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Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

14th plenary meeting

Friday, 26 September 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Address by Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Mugabe: Let me congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that your leadership as well as your vast political and diplomatic experience will successfully carry us through this session. We extend to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, our sincere appreciation for the excellent manner in which he guided the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, which just ended.

Our meeting today is overshadowed by the death of Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello and of 22 other United Nations workers, who were killed in the line of duty in Baghdad on 19 August 2003.

I join my colleagues in extending my personal condolences and those of my Government and of the

people of Zimbabwe to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the bereaved families. Against this tragedy and the inauspicious developments in Iraq, we cannot allow ourselves to treat this session as merely routine. At the heart of the tragedy in that nation is the unprecedented assault on the ethic and function of multilateralism in world affairs represented by the Security Council, the only guarantor of global peace, order and security.

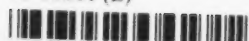
Some powerful Western nations, led by the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Britain, went into a war of unclear objectives in the face of clear opposition from the rest of the world, and, as we now know, with clear opposition from their own people as well.

It was and remains an unjust, illegitimate war — unjust to the extent that it was founded and prosecuted on false words; illegitimate to the extent that it was not sanctioned by the United Nations and has transformed itself into an effective occupation of a sovereign people.

There can never be world peace under conditions of foreign invasion and occupation. There can never be world security and order when naked power suspends, and substitutes with unilateralism, the hallowed principle of multilateralism, on the basis of which we have made, kept, preserved and expanded peace since the Second World War. We tell the General Assembly that as a people from a continent that has suffered a similar fate in recent history; indeed, as a people who had to overthrow foreign imperial occupation through costly struggles.

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It is a strange logic that the Iraqis pay for a bad president, a bad government and a bad war by occupation and loss of their sovereignty. Let us state here quite clearly to both Britain and the United States that the Iraqi people must have the sovereign right to determine the affairs of their country restored immediately. Like all peoples of the world, their love for freedom and self-rule is just as strong and just as deep as their hatred for bad leadership and bad government. Like all peoples of the world, they are unwilling to be occupied and governed by a foreign coalition, however willing and powerful it may be. No people want that, and we of Africa know it.

We must reject the present road map of naked unilateralism for consent-oriented statecraft in world affairs. What is the future of the world without the United Nations? We hope the coalition that willingly went to war with Iraq without Security Council sanction is now willing to admit that defeating others is not always the same as winning peace and that wars are ended not by proclamations, but by just settlements. Indeed, we hope that they have learned from their costly mistakes and are willing to let the United Nations reassert its authority in the broader search for peace and security in Iraq.

If we are to overcome crises that could result in calamitous wars and social breakdowns, and to achieve peace and stability with justice, we need humane global governance under the leadership of the United Nations, as distinct from a unilateral global state and government. Only that type of governance can make and build peace, and indeed keep peace for mankind.

Let it not be said that Zimbabwe enjoys criticizing the United States and Britain for the sake of criticism. Our criticisms are founded on sound, fundamental principles. Let it not be forgotten that Zimbabwe was in the chair when the Security Council authorized the first Gulf War. We stood firmly then by the United Nations and the countries, including the United States and Britain, that removed Iraq from Kuwait. We did so on the basis that expansionism and occupation of a sovereign country and people cannot be right, can never be just and warranted under any circumstances. We admired the deployment of power to just ends, under the auspices of the United Nations. It is the absence of the same ingredients that explains our indignation and our sharp censure of the so-called coalition of the willing that does not seem to recognize

that both the Iraqis and the world are unwilling to sanction the means employed and the end achieved.

The inadequacies of existing international institutions in dealing with present challenges is a sad testimony to their flawed foundational conceptions amidst changing circumstances. We have anachronistic institutions relying too comfortably on traditional norms to address new challenges. Decades after the defeat of Nazi Germany, does the world still need to rely on a system founded on the principle of rewarding the allied Powers for defeating Nazi Germany and thereby bringing post-world war peace?

At its foundation, the United Nations collective system allowed two classes of response. If a minor Power committed aggression and there was unanimity among the five permanent members of the Security Council, a collective response could follow. However, if a permanent member was opposed to such action it could use its veto. In historical terms, that approach represents the institutionalization of a particular form of world order, namely, the immediate post-1945 world order, which sought to reward and empower the allied Powers as the only competent stewards of world peace. But the world has changed a great deal since then. Just as many new nations have emerged since then, the allied Powers have also evolved in ways that easily make them actors of injustice, and therefore threats to world peace. Global power is now unipolar.

The reality today is that we cannot treat the United Nations system as given. The institutional arrangements in place were relevant only for a specified period, and must inevitably be adapted, transformed or even radically modified as material circumstances have changed and prevailing meanings, practices and purposes have been challenged by new inter-subjective voices. In today's unipolar world, what can the Security Council do to one of its permanent members whose actions threaten world peace?

At a time when citizens everywhere are pressing for a greater say in national governance, it is imperative for us as heads of State and Government to seek, in turn, a fairer representation through the democratization of multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization. What is good for the goose must surely be good for the gander. The present autocracy in global governance must be challenged stoutly so that all nations, big or small, have an equal

say and equal power in the way in which we govern world affairs.

The Security Council just has to democratize, and that means re-examining its composition and the way in which power is distributed, and therefore exercised, within that crucial body. I am happy that the Secretary-General's current report entitled "Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration", is in agreement with our concerns that

"The composition of the Security Council — unchanged in its essentials since 1945 — seems at odds with the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century." [A/58/323, para. 96]

In the light of that stark reality, it is evident that the decisions of the Security Council, which have a decisive impact on events in the real world, increasingly lack legitimacy in the eyes of the developing world.

Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, popularly known as the World Bank, whose *raison d'être* was to provide assistance to the developing world, have succumbed to the whims and caprices of the major Powers. The Bretton Woods institutions, in their current form and practice, are designed to deny developing countries the capacity to chart their independent developmental path. The extraneous conditionalities of the Bretton Woods institutions, imposed by the powerful countries for the qualification or disqualification of beneficiaries, are intended to further the national interests of the big Powers and to justify wanton interference in the affairs of small nations.

Is it not a baffling irony that a small country like Zimbabwe, which, after it responded positively to a distress call by a neighbour suffering aggression — even by United Nations reckoning — was deemed ineligible to access IMF and World Bank funding for the very reason of having gone to the rescue of that neighbour? One hopes that the new, recent realization by the World Bank that land reforms are at the heart of poverty eradication mark the beginning of a new outlook on its part.

Notwithstanding that determined and resolute attempt at frustrating our land-reform programme, the fast-track phase through which we reasserted our sovereign right over our land as a principal resource is largely concluded, and is now yielding tangible

benefits to the vast majority of our people. There is a new sense of empowerment, yielding a happy sense of ownership, which has brought thousands upon thousands of hitherto marginalized families back into the economic mainstream. Zimbabwe's National Economic Revival Programme gives clear priority to agriculture as the engine for economic revival and growth. We are forging ahead on the basis of our own efforts and support from nations of good will. We are determined to move on and succeed. A land review committee recently set up by my Government to assess the whole reform programme has now submitted its findings, which will help us in mapping the way forward to achieve sustainable development in the agricultural sector, in line with the criteria and objectives we set ourselves.

In the area of world trade, Zimbabwe believes in a multilateral trading system that serves well all members of the trading nations. It is therefore a matter of some grave regret that the developing countries of the South and those of the developed North could not reconcile their differences, and thus rendered inconclusive the Cancún mid-term review of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Doha Development Agenda. We in the South were right to reject the so-called new issues that the North insisted be negotiated first. We urge the North to engage in honest negotiations and to desist from trying to use the WTO forum for hegemonic ends.

Zimbabwe and other countries in the subregion continue to grapple with the effects of the HIV/AIDS scourge. To combat the epidemic, my Government has declared HIV/AIDS a national emergency. We have embarked on a national programme of prevention, the highlight of which consists of mass mobilization to deepen awareness and understanding of the disease. As a result of that campaign, our infection rate in the sexually active 15 to 49 age group has come down from 35 per cent to 24 per cent. Through our national efforts, the AIDS levy has to date raised \$8 billion. That money is being distributed through a decentralized structure that ensures accessibility right down to the village level. We call upon the international community to complement our efforts.

The situation in the Middle East remains grave and troubled. A conflict that is quite costly on both sides of the divide continues unabated, with the only response from the international community coming by way of episodic judgements that maldistribute blame on the basis of individual national interests. Especially

wrong is the belief that settlement can come only through ostracizing and even eliminating the leadership of the Palestinian people. Assassinations and extrajudicial killings must be rejected as a formula for peace.

Zimbabwe welcomes the measures adopted by the Security Council aimed at strengthening the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are encouraged by the increase, under a Chapter VII mandate, of the force levels of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as by the imposition of a 12-month arms embargo over areas in the troubled eastern part of the Congo.

We also urge the international community to rally behind the peace initiative of the Economic Community of West African States aimed at bringing peace to Liberia. The transition to peace in Liberia has confirmed that, with international goodwill and support, African solutions to African problems are possible. To strengthen the peace process, we call upon the international community to address the humanitarian crisis facing the Liberian people as a result of a debilitating civil war.

My country remains committed to playing a positive role in peacekeeping efforts carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. Indeed, we have so far played our part fully and magnificently.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (continued)

General debate

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Gül, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Mr. Gül (Turkey): I should like to start by extending our warmest congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, as well as our full support. I also wish to pay tribute to Mr. Jan Kavan, the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

The memory of the many innocent people who lost their lives during the horrors of 11 September, and that of many other victims of terror all over the world, including in my country, are still very fresh in our minds today. We also mourn the painful loss of our United Nations colleagues. They were working in the service of the international community to secure peace and to uphold human dignity in Baghdad. The loss of Sergio Vieira de Mello was particularly tragic for us, as his visit to Ankara two weeks before his tragic death unfortunately turned out to be his last. Terrorism is a crime against humanity. We are duty-bound to eradicate that evil from the face of the Earth, and soon.

We must also not forget that there are other major challenges that remain to be addressed, namely, poverty, illiteracy, organized crime, the problem of narcotics, ecological disasters, epidemics such as AIDS, the issue of refugees, the illegal trade in human beings, gender inequality, corruption, racism and xenophobia, among others.

In the new global security environment, there is a clear and pressing need to strengthen international organizations and institutions. The United Nations is at the top of that list. The many challenges facing the world today underline the central role of the United Nations, as has been highlighted so eloquently by the Secretary-General. The efforts to adapt this unique Organization to the realities of today's international life should be resolutely pursued. The world needs a more representative, effective and efficient United Nations.

In close cooperation with the United Nations, Turkey has accumulated vast experience over the years in the areas of regional cooperation, peacekeeping and conflict prevention. We have also shown a strong will to solve our bilateral foreign policy problems. Today we have very good relations with some neighbouring countries with which we experienced difficulties in the recent past. We are also doing our best to contribute to the solution of problems in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

In order to promote harmony among civilizations, we convened a meeting last year in Istanbul between the European Union and the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Next year, both the NATO summit and the OIC's ministerial meeting will be held in that city.

My Government's reforms at home reflect a sustained effort to promote democracy, human rights,

the rule of law, civil society, good governance, accountability and gender equality to the highest standards set by the United Nations and the European Union. The results show that national and spiritual values can be in perfect harmony with contemporary living standards. Integration with the world is not possible without bringing our values and traditions into harmony with modernity.

It is on the strength of that increasingly relevant Turkish experience and on the strength of the richness of our ties with the international community that Turkey has decided to present its candidature for a seat in the Security Council for the years 2009-2010.

The situation in the Middle East will remain of crucial significance for the evolution of the international environment for some time to come. We do not believe that the Middle East is condemned to eternal strife and suffering. This is one cradle of civilization that had enjoyed peace and prosperity for centuries. That is why we believe that it is feasible today to transform the Middle East into a region of security, cooperation and prosperity. There is an urgent need today for a fresh start in the region. The situation in Iraq and the Arab-Israeli conflict are at the core of efforts to bring stability to the region.

The events of this year have brought Iraq to the beginning of a new era. All of us need to help the Iraqi nation in its formidable task of building a united, free, democratic and prosperous future. It is therefore highly important for the Security Council to agree on a mandate responsive to the needs of stabilization and reconstruction. Iraq is our close neighbour. That country's future and the future of the region's stability are inter-linked.

In the Middle East we are again witnessing a cycle of terror and violence that is taking hostage all efforts towards peace. We view the restoration of the channels of communication and dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis as the most urgent task at hand. We believe that sending the elected President of the Palestinian National Authority into exile cannot serve any good purpose. We call upon the Israeli Government to review its position. At the same time, we urge the Palestinian side to make every effort to prevent further terrorist attacks. Turkey has close ties with both Israelis and Palestinians. We remain ready to contribute to the implementation of the road map, to which we believe there is no alternative. We are also

willing to contribute to the improvement of the security environment as needed, and to the alleviation of the harsh living conditions of Palestinians.

In order to achieve progress, resources have to be utilized rationally and to the benefit of the people, as the Iraqi case has shown. The need for reform is not a novelty in the Middle East. What may be new is the growing recognition that progress is dependent on political and social factors, as well as on economic ones. Gradual steps towards more representative and accountable structures are being taken by a number of countries in the Middle East. They deserve the encouragement of the international community.

The world needs the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. It does not need them to proliferate. The inherent logic of that argument has been recognized by the community of nations that have adhered to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We strongly support the efforts aimed at increasing membership in non-proliferation agreements and regimes.

My country's regional policies are shaped by our desire to achieve durable peace and greater cooperation in our neighbourhood. I have already outlined our approach with regard to the Middle East.

The Balkans, which is to our west, was in turmoil until recently. That region has come to enjoy relative peace and stability in the past two years. International organizations, notably NATO, the European Union, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, played a major role in that turnaround. However, the situation in certain parts of the region should continue to be monitored on an ongoing basis, as it is a potential source of destabilization.

We are determined to further enhance our relations with Greece within the current process of constructive dialogue. We are pleased with the progress achieved so far, as highlighted by my Greek colleague, Mr. Papandreou, in the statement he made this morning. We have already covered considerable ground. We are convinced that the ongoing dialogue and the resulting atmosphere of mutual confidence will serve the interests of both Turkey and Greece.

Turkey sincerely desires a lasting political settlement establishing a new partnership in Cyprus. This issue has been with us since 1963. Attempts to distort the facts in the island will not help efforts aimed

at a comprehensive settlement. We continue to support the good offices mission of the Secretary-General. A new partnership in Cyprus should be based on a compromise between Turkish and Greek Cypriots and on equal status. Furthermore, a settlement should preserve the bizonal character of the island and ensure the security of the Turkish Cypriot people.

At the present stage of the situation in Cyprus it is necessary to create a basis for substantive negotiations. The opportunity created by President Denktas' latest proposals, which are designed to overcome the lack of confidence between the two sides, should be seized. Indeed, the Greek Cypriot side, instead of trying to take advantage of the prospect of its unilateral accession to the European Union, should act in a spirit of goodwill and contribute to the negotiating process. All embargoes and restrictions imposed upon the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus should be lifted as a matter of priority.

The Caucasus is another strategically important area of great interest to Turkey. The long-standing conflicts there must end, and good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation should be given a real chance to flourish. The problems of Nagorny Karabakh and Abkhazia still endanger peace and stability in the entire region. Turkey expects Armenia to fully comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions in order to find a prompt and just solution to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. The peaceful settlement of this conflict will contribute to the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations and to regional cooperation. As regards the Abkhazian conflict, Turkey believes that a peaceful settlement should be reached within the context of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political unity of Georgia.

Close historical and cultural bonds with Central Asia constitute one of the pillars of our Eurasian vision. We have developed mutually beneficial bilateral relations with the Central Asian States since their independence. We should make substantial efforts to improve regional stability and security and continue to support those States with a view to their further integration into the international community. We all know that the security of Central Asia is inseparable from global security.

Traditionally a close friend of Afghanistan, Turkey has contributed for many years to the rehabilitation of that country. We are pleased that the Bonn process has so far been implemented successfully, despite numerous

difficulties. We commend the performance of the Transitional Administration in this respect. The success of the Bonn process will depend to a large extent on greater support from the international community.

We firmly believe that it will not be possible to establish global stability unless peace, security, democracy and sustainable development are promoted in Africa. Recent trends in the management of crises in Africa, as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development, give us fresh hope in this regard.

In conclusion, I should like to stress that Turkey is determined to remain a major contributor to peace, security and stability in our region and beyond. Turkey pursues a multidimensional foreign policy that is active in various regions. We believe in the vital role of the United Nations and its increased relevance in the present international environment, and we are committed to promoting the effectiveness of our Organization.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Phil Goff, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand.

Mr. Goff (New Zealand): The General Assembly is meeting in the shadow of the tragedy last month in which United Nations staff were killed or injured in Baghdad. New Zealand unreservedly condemns such brutal and calculated acts of terror. The United Nations, after all, was in Iraq to improve the conditions of Iraqi people and to assist the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty.

We mourn the loss of all those who perished. In particular, I pay tribute to Sergio Vieira de Mello, who worked so effectively in the world's trouble spots, including Timor-Leste, where New Zealand worked alongside him and developed huge admiration for his ability and determination.

This was not the first occasion on which the employees of the international community have been targeted, although it was the worst. History suggests that it will not be the last.

To do its work effectively, the United Nations must interact with local communities, not operate from behind barbed wire and concrete barriers. Its employees are mainly unarmed civilians. We, the States Members of the United Nations, must do more to protect those whom we employ to work on our behalf.

Nine years ago New Zealand was at the forefront in creating the Convention for the Safety of United

Nations and Associated Personnel. It was opened for signature in 1995. Regrettably, only one third of the membership has since become a party to it. We urge all countries to do so now.

New Zealand believes that the Convention should be widened to cover all situations where United Nations and other associated personnel are engaged in peacekeeping, humanitarian and other assistance-related activities.

Over the last year we have witnessed terrorist attacks, including in Casablanca, Riyadh and Jakarta, as well as in Baghdad.

Next month is the first anniversary of the terrorist attack in Bali, in which more than 200 people lost their lives. And two years ago this city itself was the victim of the 9/11 attacks, which took 3,000 lives. International terrorism remains the primary threat to the security and well-being of people across the world.

If we are to defeat terrorism, regional cooperation is imperative. In the Asia Pacific region, a concerted response to terrorism is now at the centre of the Association of South-east Asian Nations Regional Forum agenda and is becoming increasingly important in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

The Pacific Islands Forum is responding collectively to security challenges, including terrorism, transnational crimes and challenges to national integrity and independence.

An effective campaign against terrorism requires international collaboration on intelligence, military, social and economic measures.

New Zealand is aware that while we focus on the symptoms of terrorism, the international community must work together to tackle the conditions that foster it. We welcome the Norwegian initiative to strengthen analysis of the causes of terrorism. There are simply no ends that can justify the death and the maiming of vulnerable and innocent people.

New Zealand has, since 1972, supported the development of a comprehensive international regime to outlaw terrorism. I hope that the General Assembly will be able to move forward on this issue and conclude the comprehensive and nuclear terrorism conventions.

In combating terrorism, however, we should avoid undermining the very values we are seeking to uphold. The fight against terrorism should not become

an excuse to justify actions that do not conform to international standards of humanity.

New Zealand is the current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, which it hosted last month. Leaders strongly endorsed the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands — a concrete example of the region working together to assist one of its members to restore security, stability and progress to its people.

New Zealand joined with the other members of the Pacific Islands Forum in responding to a request from the Solomon Islands Government for police and military assistance to end the actions of armed criminals responsible for the deterioration in the social and economic conditions in the Solomon Islands. A police-led operation has been working successfully to restore the rule of law and economic stability.

In failed or weak States, Governments often lack the capacity or will to exercise territorial control. That can create a power vacuum for terrorist organizations and criminals to exploit and maintain safe havens, training facilities and bases for launching terrorist operations.

The Regional Assistance Mission has gone exceptionally well to date and has received strong support from the people of the Solomon Islands. It is a Pacific solution to a Pacific problem. Cooperation and commitment by Pacific States to respond to regional security needs, under the umbrella of the Pacific Islands Forum, is a model that other regions could adopt.

The statements of support from the Secretary-General and the Security Council for this regional action, taken in accordance with the Charter, are welcome. We would urge the United Nations to assist where it can the process of rebuilding the social structure and the economy of that country.

New Zealand is working to enhance and complement existing security capabilities within the Pacific region. We are engaged in a number of activities, including establishing border security systems and drafting model legislation to address terrorism and transnational organized crime.

The international community must retain an ongoing commitment to Afghanistan, where President Karzai's Government continues to face significant challenges. Improving security outside Kabul will be a crucial element in bringing political stability to Afghanistan.

It is in the interests of us all to assist in the restoration of Afghanistan — not only for the well-being of the Afghan people, but also so that terrorists cannot operate freely within its borders.

Earlier this week, New Zealand assumed leadership of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamian Province. I am pleased that we could demonstrate support for the Afghanistan Transitional Government in this way.

The shared nightmare of all States is that weapons of mass destruction or the materials from which they can be constructed will find their way into the terrorist arsenal. The possibility of nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists is a worst-case scenario with horrific implications. We must do everything we can to prevent this from happening.

The possible acquisition of nuclear weapons by terrorist groups increases as the numbers and types of these weapons, and the States that possess them, continue to expand. For these and other reasons the elimination of these weapons is vital.

New Zealand calls on all countries to commit and to adhere to multilateral disarmament and arms control treaties.

North Korea's proclaimed nuclear weapons programme is a major concern. We urge North Korea to resume its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The current multilateral dialogue process is a positive way forward. We commend China for facilitating this.

Iran, too, must heed the strong message of the international community and take the urgent steps required to restore confidence that its nuclear intentions are peaceful.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is equally about nuclear disarmament. The commitment given by the nuclear-weapon States to give up their nuclear weapons, reaffirmed unequivocally at the NPT Review Conference in 2000, must be honoured.

The nuclear Powers have a particular responsibility in this respect. They must lead by example against proliferation. Meaningful steps toward permanent disarmament would add to their moral authority in demanding that others must not develop nuclear weapons capability.

The invasion of Iraq has had a profound impact on this Organization. We regret that differences of view could not be resolved in the Security Council.

The reconstruction of Iraq, the restoration of its sovereignty and the rebuilding of political and social structures to guarantee the Iraqi people a better life are now the critical issues. We welcome initiatives to push forward the political and constitutional process.

The passage of Security Council resolutions 1483 (2003) and 1500 (2003) recognizes the vital role of the United Nations and the need for the international community to be fully engaged in reconstruction efforts. While responsibility for security must inevitably rest with coalition forces, multilateralism offers the best prospect and the greatest legitimacy for the process of transition back to Iraqi self-rule.

New Zealand has announced substantial contributions to reconstruction and humanitarian relief work. These include the deployment of a New Zealand Defence Force light engineer group to work on humanitarian and reconstruction tasks alongside a United Kingdom engineer regiment in southern Iraq. We have helped with demining operations and have made contributions through United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and non-governmental organizations.

New Zealand continues to view the United Nations as the best hope we have to collectively pursue the principles enshrined in the Charter. The strength of the United Nations is that it brings all countries of the world together on an equal footing to address common problems. Millions of people around the world have had their lives improved by the actions of the United Nations. East Timor is but one recent example of its effectiveness when it is supported by a common will to act.

At the same time, we all recognize the need to reform the Organization. In opening this session, the Secretary-General called on us to consider whether the rules and instruments of this multilateral institution continue to serve us well. We have been discussing the reform of the Security Council for more than a decade now. It is time to make an institution designed in an earlier age, for a smaller number of nations more representative and responsive to the 191 current Members of the United Nations. We welcome the establishment of a panel to address key issues fundamental to the Organization's future role. Member States will need to put aside self-interest and

differences to reach agreement on the panel's findings and to translate those into action.

Fifty-eight years ago, the United Nations was created in the aftermath of the death and devastation that had resulted from two world wars. The vision of its founders was that of an organization that would establish rules to govern international behaviour, with procedures to enforce them through collective action. The United Nations was bestowed with a unique legitimacy and unique authority to resolve conflict. Whatever its shortcomings, it remains an indispensable organization.

The challenge before us is to create the structures and provide the political will that will enable it to deliver the peaceful, just and prosperous world that is the hope and expectation of humanity.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Sheik Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

Sheik Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to extend to you, Sir, our sincere congratulations on your election to the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Allow me to wish you and the members of the Bureau every possible success. I should also like to express our thanks and appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the fifty-seventh session, for his great efforts in conducting the work of the General Assembly. It also gives me pleasure to recognize Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who deserves our sincere thanks, respect and admiration for his tireless efforts.

Today, the world is experiencing a difficult, critical and highly complex phase in international relations, marked by political and strategic changes affecting the elements and objectives of those relations. This is the result of the emergence of a new, complicated and multifaceted set of problems and acute regional and international crises, whose root causes we must deal with promptly and in a serious manner. Moreover, we must prevent such crises from worsening and spreading. We must therefore strive to strengthen the role of the United Nations, enhance its institutions and provide it with the essential resources so it can fulfil its mission throughout the world.

First, it is imperative that we mobilize the political will needed to enable the Organization to shoulder its responsibilities and carry out its duties.

That is particularly important for the permanent members of the Security Council because those countries bear the primary responsibility for achieving that goal, which will enable the Organization to perform its functions in a genuinely democratic spirit, reflecting the new international conditions and the interests and aspirations of all peoples of the world without exclusion or preference.

In that context, we underline the need to reach agreement on a new formula for the composition of the Security Council and to modernize its working methods, as it is the international body charged with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The Council's current composition, working methods and decision-making process do not respond to the needs of the international community or give Member States an opportunity to speak on the vital and critical issues that affect us all.

In the State of Qatar, we were shocked and saddened by the horrific attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. That attack claimed the lives of many innocent victims: the United Nations staff members who were carrying out their humanitarian mission, foremost among them the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and many Iraqis. That heinous act of terrorism illustrates in our view the nature of the challenges and the seriousness of the threats besetting the work of the United Nations and international humanitarian organizations in Iraq and elsewhere. We also strongly condemn the terrorist act targeting the United Nations headquarters in Iraq earlier this week.

The difficult and tragic circumstances now prevailing in the brotherly country of Iraq compel us to cooperate in order to help the Iraqi people overcome that situation and its consequences.

I must underline once again the fundamental principles underlying our position with respect to the Iraqi crisis and the means necessary to deal with it. We have consistently affirmed our commitment to the territorial integrity, national unity and sovereignty of Iraq and to the right of Iraqis to self-determination, to the restoration of their independence and sovereignty and to the reconstruction of their homeland, as well as to their right to live in dignity and freedom in their own land.

In that context, we look forward to the success of the international efforts to strengthen security and stability in Iraq. We call upon the coalition forces to

achieve that essential objective and to intensify coordination with the competent international bodies and institutions in order to pave the way for the country's return to normalcy. We call upon the coalition forces to allow the Iraqi people, of all factions and political trends, to exercise their legitimate right to choose their own political leadership through free, democratic elections, giving expression to their aspirations, hopes and wishes.

In that regard, we also welcome the establishment of the Interim Governing Council and the interim Iraqi Government that emerged from it; they mark an important positive step, and we hope that they will contribute to achieving the desired transition towards consolidated democracy in the country and the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Iraqi State institutions. That should be accomplished by drafting a new constitution, holding free democratic elections, putting an early end to the occupation through a specific timetable and allowing Iraq to reclaim its rightful position in the region and in the larger international community.

We urge the United Nations to play an effective, essential role in helping Iraq achieve those objectives. Moreover, the international community is urgently called upon to help in Iraq's reconstruction and to meet the Iraqi people's needs in various areas in order to build a new Iraq of democracy, equality and respect for human rights.

With regard to developing Iraq's infrastructure of higher education, it is noteworthy that the consort of His Royal Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar, Her Royal Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education + 5 of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), launched a lofty initiative in a statement before the World Conference on Higher Education, held in Paris at UNESCO headquarters. The initiative called for the establishment of an international fund for Iraqi higher education, with the objective of providing both immediate and long-term assistance for the rehabilitation of higher education in brotherly Iraq. The State of Qatar has made the first contribution to the fund, in the amount of \$15 million.

My country has also been participating in international efforts to rebuild Iraq. It has developed a special programme that includes the building of hospitals and educational and residential units. In addition, we have a special programme in Afghanistan

that assists in the rebuilding of that country; the programme's cost has amounted to \$62 million thus far.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine are at the top of the list of the conflicts that need concerted action in order to achieve a just, final and comprehensive solution, particularly in the light of the continuation and acceleration of the bloody confrontation that has raged between the Palestinian people and Israeli occupation forces for so many years. It must be noted that we in the State of Qatar have welcomed the road map. We expressed our support for the Quartet's efforts to have both sides begin implementing the various stages of the road map, in keeping with the vision articulated by Mr. George Bush, President of the United States, as a basis for the final solution of establishing two States living side by side. We did so despite the many difficulties, obstacles and setbacks encountered by those efforts in the past few weeks. We must also firmly stress that implementation of the road map cannot be undertaken by only one side — the Palestinian people. It requires that the Israeli side also fulfil its obligations and take the necessary actions in that regard.

All of the aforementioned requires that the international community and the members of the Quartet — particularly the United States of America — intervene, intensify their efforts and increase their pressure on the Israeli Government so that it will do its part, in return for the Palestinians' commitment to do theirs. Thus, Israeli occupation forces must refrain from carrying out assassinations, must lift the siege that they have imposed on Palestinian territories, enable the Palestinians to live in security, peace and dignity on their own land and to move freely in their own areas, put an end to the policies of starvation, humiliation and house demolition, and cease construction of the buffer wall currently being built by the Israeli authorities.

In that connection, I cannot fail to note the positive gesture that we witnessed a few days ago by the Libyan Government's closing of the Lockerbie file, an outcome that was achieved in cooperation with the other parties concerned and in the context of United Nations institutions. We should also note the positive response of the Governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and France to that gesture, which bore fruit and ultimately led to the conclusion of an agreement.

The phenomena of terrorism and extremism continue to be among the most important challenges

facing the world. As we express our total rejection and condemnation of those subversive phenomena — in all their forms and manifestations, and regardless of their sources or motivations — we reaffirm that we stand by the side of the international community and that we support whatever efforts and measures are required to eliminate terrorism and to strengthen the foundations of security and stability.

Democracy is an expression of responsible participation in political decision-making. It involves the establishment of State institutions and adherence to the rule of law within the State; it provides for accountability and for assessment of the performance of governmental institutions; it ensures good governance and safeguards the rights of citizens. As such, it is the best way to achieve the priorities of national development and the objectives of modernization and reform, to which our peoples and societies aspire. On the basis of those principles, the State of Qatar recently conducted a referendum on a political Constitution that gives women the right to political participation, both as voters and as candidates for Parliament, which will be elected through the ballot box for the first time. The Constitution also governs the relationship between the Government and the people and provides for the separation of the three branches of government.

With regard to human rights, an independent human rights commission has been established in the State of Qatar. The commission submits its recommendations to competent State authorities with a view to developing and improving civil liberties. As promoting awareness of civil rights requires that we improve education and upgrade its standards — as well as expanding it to include all segments of society — we have restructured our educational system. Moreover, a number of well-known universities based in developed countries have set up branches in the State of Qatar.

In conclusion, the fulfilment of our aspirations lies in affirming the role of the United Nations, in enhancing its position and in maximizing its potential. It is through the Organization that we hope to establish international relations on the basis of understanding, cooperation and common interests. And it is through the United Nations that we hope one day to succeed in settling crises and disputes; eliminating threats of violence, the use of force and terrorism; and ending the wasting of resources and energies on wars and conflicts, directing them instead to the service of development, progress and prosperity. Similarly, we

aspire to a new world built on the principles of justice, equality, liberty, democracy and peaceful coexistence among all the world's peoples, nations and cultures. That is an aspiration that our peoples, our youth and our future generations fully deserve. It is an aspiration to which we are wedded and which we cherish, because that vision occupies the highest priority in building the world of the future: the world that we all seek and desire. It is a world that we hope one day to attain as an international community — as one family living together on this planet, God willing.

The President: I now call on Her Excellency The Honourable Billie Miller, Senior Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

Ms. Miller (Barbados): I take special pleasure in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. The unanimous election of the smallest State ever to hold that post speaks not only of the confidence which Member States place in your own ability, but also of their recognition of the critical role which small States play in the multilateral process. We are delighted at your elevation to this high office, and we wish to assure you that, in carrying out your responsibilities, you will be able to count on the unequivocal support not only of Saint Lucia, but also of the entire Caribbean fraternity. I wish also to thank your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, who very ably guided the work of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly during a most trying and tumultuous year.

On 19 August, the world was again plunged into shock and despair as we witnessed the heinous attack on the United Nations Office in Baghdad and the loss of life of United Nations personnel stationed there. A second attempt this week added to the toll of casualties. I extend to the United Nations family, as well as the delegations represented here, whose compatriots were the victims of that violent attack, the deepest condolences of the Government and people of Barbados.

We pause especially to pay tribute to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, an international civil servant and diplomat of the highest calibre. His death comes at a time when the world can least afford it. We join with Members in mourning his passing as we mourn all those who perished at his side in the service of the people of Iraq.

Amidst the turmoil and carnage that has become a dismal feature of the daily life of so many millions in

our global society, this assault on the United Nations was particularly startling in its cruelty and distressing in its intention. As our Secretary-General has affirmed: "This was the most deliberate and vicious attack against the United Nations in its history." It is the cruellest of ironies that such an attack could have been conceived and carried out against an Organization in which we all have a stake, and one which epitomizes the principles and ideals to which we all ascribe, and whose primary purpose is peace.

The global environment, over the past year, has teetered on the brink of chaos. We have witnessed increased instances of the pursuit of violence and retribution as first responses to the resolution of conflict, and we have experienced the relegation of diplomacy and multilateralism to afterthoughts.

Some of the most intractable problems facing the international community, in the year 2003 and beyond, are the divisions, uncertainties and doubts that have emerged since the United States-led invasion of Iraq. Our duty as members of this family of nations is to ensure that we remain committed to the United Nations, as the only organization that can move us past the current cycle of retribution to a path of sustainable peace. As we search for adequate collective responses to the non-traditional threats to human security, the task ahead will be to bring to bear a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to security, in all its aspects, and to reiterate the continued relevance of this concept to the global agenda.

The challenges to small States in such an uncertain environment are numerous and at times overwhelming. We lack the financial dexterity to respond to economic crises as swiftly and decisively as is necessary. We have no military might and so our only avenue for handling traditional threats to security rests squarely within a multilateral framework, which resorts to military action only when, despite our best efforts, peace cannot be achieved through diplomacy.

Since the end of the conflicts of European empire-building, our region, the Caribbean, has had a history of peace and stability, which is sustained through a simple but sure formula: celebration of our commonalities; tolerance of our differences; mutual respect for each other's sovereignty; and adherence to the principles of democracy, good governance and the rule of law. We would wish to commend this formula to those who find the key to peaceful co-existence elusive.

Barbados remains unwavering in its commitment to the precepts of multilateralism, and to the belief that no other international institution is better suited or equipped to meet the diverse demands for global peace, security and development than the United Nations. As members of this Organization, we are assured that our voice will be heard regardless of our size or economic power. Therefore, while we may not have the capacity to influence situations by way of exerting military, economic or even political power, we do cherish our right to express our opinions about any issue of concern to us, without let or hindrance.

The United Nations is not a third party separate from the Member Governments but is rather the sum of its Members; it belongs to them and they share all the benefits, problems and collective responsibilities of ownership. Barbados shares the view so eloquently expressed by the Secretary-General that: "The United Nations exists, not as a static memorial to the aspirations of an earlier age, but as a work in progress — imperfect, as all human endeavours must be, but capable of adaptation and improvement." We are all accountable for its shortcomings and must all strive for its improvement.

To the extent that the United Nations represents our collective effort at a mechanism for global governance, it is amenable to the benefits of good governance practices. For we believe that good governance is as important at the international level as it is at the national level. It is perhaps the single most important factor in promoting development, reducing inequalities and advancing the cause of peace.

We should therefore seize this moment in time to recommit ourselves to making the United Nations more effective and efficient. Bold and serious reorganization initiatives, including the revitalization of the General Assembly, and the reform of the Security Council are urgently needed. We must also find effective coordination modalities to give new impetus to the follow-up to the major conferences and summits of the last decade, which, in most instances, have simply been reduced to standing items on the annual agenda of this body and rhetoric-filled resolutions reaffirming the status quo.

We must resolve, during this session and henceforth, to take concrete actions towards making the Security Council more representative and transparent and towards ensuring that the General Assembly moves beyond the symbolic politics of passing resolutions to the hard work of negotiating change.

For it is a source of the greatest continuing concern to us that too many of the premier multilateral institutions — which are charged with the fundamental responsibility of shaping the rules by which global society is governed, whether in the area of peace and security, or trade, or finance and development — are constrained by structure and tradition to carry out their mandate in a manner that is patently devoid of democracy or transparency. Reform must therefore extend beyond the confines of New York to reach deep into the operations of the international financial institutions, the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Financial Action Task Force on Money-Laundering and all other bodies that seek to prescribe the norms of behaviour for the international community without the full participation of that community in the decision-making process.

If the International Conference on Financing for Development had one failing, it was its inability to conceive of a new system for financial governance to redress the deficiencies and imbalances of the past — a system that is durable enough to serve for generations to come. In this regard, I wish to reiterate the call made at Monterrey by the Prime Minister of Barbados, The Right Honourable Owen Arthur, for the creation of a rules-based world financial authority to supervise today's complex global financial and capital markets better than the Bretton Woods institutions can, and for an international tax organization to oversee global cooperation in cross-border tax matters.

Despite a commitment made by all States at Monterrey towards the development of a universal framework to facilitate all-inclusive dialogue on matters pertaining to international tax cooperation, sufficient progress has not been forthcoming. While we are encouraged by and supportive of recent proposals to strengthen the United Nations Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters, these efforts are insufficient to provide for a truly universal, transparent and legitimate intergovernmental framework to promote cooperation among all States on tax matters.

Equally, Barbados believes that the all-important fight against money-laundering must now be waged by the international community as a whole, led by a genuinely representative international body, drawing its membership from all the countries of the world, within the family of the United Nations. While we are most appreciative of the vital work that has been done in this

regard by the Financial Action Task Force, that body remains what it has always been, a task force with a limited role, and an even more limited membership of only 31 countries.

An important step would be the adoption of an international convention against money-laundering, under the auspices of the United Nations. Such a convention would establish a genuine international consensus on the issue of money-laundering within the universal ambit of the United Nations, where the interests and concerns of all Member States would be fairly and equally served in a common endeavour against international crime. The proposed convention would complement the work of the United Nations under the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, as well as the more recent Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

In this connection, we believe that the greatest lesson to emerge from the experience of Cancun is the clear understanding that strategies and solutions that ignore the concerns and needs of the developing world, or that fail to analyse the implications of those solutions for the most fragile and vulnerable, are doomed to failure. The special needs of small States that have no capacity whatsoever to distort world trade must be taken fully into account in fashioning the new rules of trade liberalization. To do otherwise would be to condemn the most vulnerable groups of our global family to the real threat of marginalization by a multilateral system that is supposed to provide benefits for all. It is vital that focus be restored to the Doha Development Agenda and its work programme on small economies.

Next year marks the tenth anniversary of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Out of that conference emerged the Barbados Programme of Action, which today still remains the essential blueprint for the sustainable development aspirations of all small island developing States (SIDS). As de facto custodian of the name attached to the SIDS process, Barbados accords great importance to the convening of an international meeting next year in Mauritius to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

We are convinced that the vulnerability and sustainable development challenges of SIDS, as expressed in the Barbados Programme of Action, in

Agenda 21, the Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation are now better understood by the international community. According to estimates, since 1994 small island developing States themselves have carried out approximately 70 per cent of the required actions and measures contained in the Barbados Programme of Action. The Mauritius review will present an important opportunity for us to take stock of new and emerging challenges and identify additional resources to advance implementation.

The World Summit on the Information Society is conceived as a high-level dialogue leading to achieving a new kind of society, characterized by universal access to and use of information for the creation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge. It implies the use of traditional and new technologies, especially information and communication technologies, as an essential tool for the enhancement of services and the promotion of dialogue among diverse cultures towards the attainment of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. We support the principle that the new information society must serve the best interests of all nations and peoples. It must seek through the available technology to empower the most vulnerable sectors of society and eradicate existing disparities within and among States.

The issue relating to the passage through the Caribbean Sea of ships bearing nuclear material is still unresolved. We are, from time to time, presented with studies and analyses that seek to assure us of the safety of the ships and their cargo. Despite these assurances, we all know that there is no guarantee that international terrorism will continue to ignore such a significant target or that an unthinkable accident would not occur. A major explosion on board one of these ships traversing our region would threaten the survival of surrounding States. The most acceptable solution to the problem is cessation of the trans-shipment of nuclear material through the Caribbean Sea, since, on this issue, any risk is too high.

In your address, Mr. President, upon the opening of the General Assembly, you called for action rather than inaction. This moment in global affairs will require courage and determination as we face the enormous challenges awaiting us. We may not be expected to complete the task, but then, neither are we at liberty to abstain from it.

Mr. Van den Berg (Netherlands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Mr. De Hoop Scheffer (Netherlands): The deaths of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues leave a terrible void. The loss of so many dedicated servants of the United Nations at its headquarters in Baghdad fills us with shock, grief and concern. This atrocity and the other murderous attacks we have seen in the past two years are chilling evidence that terrorists are ruthlessly targeting the civilized world. Terrorism is a direct threat to us all, to humanity as a whole.

Weapons of mass destruction are the other direct threat, an even worse threat if such weapons were to fall into the hands of terrorists.

In addition to these direct threats to peace and security, we are faced with, in the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "soft threats": poverty and hunger, environmental degradation and diseases of mass destruction like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

What all these threats have in common is that they do not stop at national borders. Their often lethal consequences affect groups of countries, whole continents or even the entire planet. The only way to tackle them is by collective action. Enforcement and implementation are the key.

But do we have the capacity to take such action? Is the existing multilateral system with its institutions and rules capable of responding to the hard threats and soft threats we are facing? I doubt it. Take the growing danger of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Can we allow a few countries to reject the rules agreed to by 187 other countries? Can we run the risk of countries turning into suppliers of nuclear arms to terrorist organizations? No, we cannot. And if today's rules cannot avert States putting humanity at risk, we must tighten those rules and we must be ready to collectively enforce them.

I therefore welcome President Bush's proposal for a binding Security Council resolution, tightening up the non-proliferation rules. I suggest that we build on existing export control regimes and make them universal and legally binding. This approach would be in line with the successful example of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), containing binding obligations for States to take action against terrorism. Other elements in a more forceful multilateral system are

greater attention to conflict prevention, better use of sanctions or "smart sanctions", an upgrading of the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspections regime and, as suggested by President Chirac, a permanent instrument for inspections at the disposal of the Security Council.

More robust multilateral action is also needed in our dealings with failed States. I am encouraged by the increased willingness of the international community to take more determined action. Liberia is a test case. The Brahimi report has shown us the right direction. Peacekeeping operations can only be effective if they are based on a strong mandate, fully implemented on the ground and fully backed by the key players in the Security Council. The five permanent members bear a special responsibility for global peace and security *Noblesse oblige*.

The United Nations is now also at the centre of the debate about Iraq. Let us put our past differences on Iraq behind us. It is crucial now that the international community support the Iraqi people in their reconstruction efforts. I trust that the Security Council will reach agreement, as soon as possible, on what we all want, in other words, stabilization, security and transfer of sovereignty to a legitimate Iraqi government. This will also allow the United Nations and the other multilateral institutions to make their indispensable contributions to a better future for the Iraqi people.

A stronger United Nations is also needed for the effective promotion and protection of human rights. I regret that we do not live up to the expectations of the oppressed. The great dependence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on voluntary contributions is a major concern. His office should instead receive a larger allocation from the regular United Nations budget. The promotion and protection of human rights is United Nations core business.

Speaking of human rights, there is no doubt that terrorism itself ranks as one of the most serious threats to democracy and the enjoyment of human rights. Terrorists seek to destroy democracy, freedom and tolerance. If we sacrifice those universal values in the struggle against terrorists, we play into their hands.

If I may speak for a moment as Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), I can assure you that our experience shows that policies aimed at promoting

human rights, the rule of law and good governance can reinforce each other as parts of a more comprehensive security strategy. The International Criminal Court is another example of how to ensure that international norms are upheld in cases where national Governments fail to do so.

On the trafficking of human beings, women and children in particular. I share the concerns expressed by President Bush. He was right to draw a comparison with slavery. For the OSCE, the threat posed by the international trafficking of drugs, of small arms and of women and children is a top priority. We have already taken concrete action, adopting the OSCE Action Plan to combat trafficking in human beings as an instrument for protecting our people. This Action Plan could serve as a model for worldwide action.

Yet another reason why we need a robust multilateral system is that we must break the cycles of poverty and violence we witness in many parts of Africa. This implies restoring stability and order as a precondition for reconstruction and development. It also requires an integrated approach. To this end my Government will set up a stability fund to tackle the twin challenges of development and security. Because development and security are closely linked, the Millennium Development Goals should remain at the centre of our policies. The Netherlands remains committed to allocating 0.8 per cent of our gross domestic product to development cooperation and I call on all countries to implement their Monterrey commitments. But development is not just a matter of aid, it will also depend on liberalizing trade. I am disappointed that the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Cancún failed to produce results.

The legitimacy of the decisions of the Security Council is questioned because the composition of the Council no longer reflects today's geopolitical realities. However, expansion is not a solution in itself. Effectiveness can easily fall victim to the quest for legitimacy. Crucial to restored legitimacy is better interaction between the members of the Council and the United Nations membership at large. Members of the Council should represent relevant and broad sections of world opinion.

I agree with the Secretary-General that we need to take a hard look at the existing architecture of international institutions. Many other organizations I know well, such as the OSCE, the European Union

(EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (and I hope to get to know the last organization even better in the near future), are in the process of redefining their roles in drastically changed circumstances. The United Nations cannot be left behind. Interaction between the United Nations on the one hand, and regional organizations such as the OSCE, the EU and NATO on the other, is growing. There is considerable scope for intensifying that interaction, as is indeed foreseen in the Charter.

As the Italian Presidency of the European Union illustrated in its intervention here some days ago, the United Nations can count on the EU in the quest for robust multilateralism. As a member State of the EU, the Netherlands fully endorses the Presidency's statement. The EU's new emphasis on countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in its common foreign and security policy is an example of how we want our common efforts to be in the vanguard.

Let me now focus on the General Assembly. Take the example of how we deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Let us connect the General Assembly to reality. Instead of dealing with 23 resolutions, should we not try to find our strength in a more focused central message, supported by all, a message that calls upon both Israel and the Palestinians to put an end to the bloodshed and violence and to immediately implement the road map as the only viable way to long-lasting peace? The EU will continue to do all it can, together with its partners in the Quartet, to help Palestinians and Israelis reach that destination. I hope that this Assembly can contribute.

The Assembly should be made more effective. I need not repeat what you all know about overlapping or hardly relevant agenda items, repetitive debates and resolutions and the prevalence of the lowest common denominator. As a contribution to improvement, my country tabled the Greentree report, the result of a seminar involving representatives from a wide circle of countries. The Greentree report aims at restoring the General Assembly to its rightful place as the centre stage for worldwide deliberations on our common problems. We are certain that in that endeavour, we will be able to count on the leadership and wisdom of the President of the General Assembly.

My Government wholeheartedly supports the decision of the Secretary-General to establish a panel of eminent persons. We look forward to his

recommendations for next year's session of the Assembly. Meanwhile, we should not sit back and wait. It is upon us Member States to engage now in the debate on the pertinent reform questions the Secretary-General has put to us.

In order to defuse the threats we face and to leave a better world for future generations, we need to do more than talk. We must act and we must act together. We need clear rules and strong institutions — institutions that ensure that the rules of the multilateral game are respected, strengthened and enforced. We need a multilateral system with teeth; we need a multilateral system that works.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rashid Abdullah Al-Noaimi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Noaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I have the honour to extend to Mr. Hunte and to his friendly country, Saint Lucia, our sincerest congratulations on his election to the presidency of the General assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

I should also like to thank his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his valuable efforts and effective leadership of the previous session.

On this occasion, I would also like to express our appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his wise leadership and perseverance in his efforts to enhance the role of the United Nations in maintaining peace, security and sustainable development.

Despite our hopes and the great humanitarian expectations that we entertained with the dawn of the new millennium, there remain many regional and international issues that have not been resolved and are a major concern to us all. They represent a serious threat to international peace and security, as well as to the stability, development and prosperity of peoples, all of which depend on respect for and implementation of the norms of international laws, and conventions.

The regrettable events that our world is witnessing today are but the natural aftermath of the previous political era, which was characterized by conflicts, occupation, oppression, injustice, the violation of human rights and wars that led to a wide range of arm races at the expense of human, economic and environmental development. If we are to confront and contain these challenges and their repercussions, it is

important to reform the United Nations and all its main bodies — especially the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — as well as to enhance cooperation and coordination between these international organizations and regional organizations.

Maintaining stability and security in the Arab Gulf area is an essential priority, not only for the peoples of the region, but also for the entire world. Accordingly, within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council and of bilateral, regional and international relations, the United Arab Emirates has adopted a foreign policy based on peaceful coexistence, confidence-building, good-neighbourliness, mutual respect, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, the settlement of disputes and the ending of occupation by peaceful means.

On the basis of its commitment to these doctrines and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the United Arab Emirates believes that the way to end the occupation of its three islands — Greater Tumb, Lesser Tumb and Abu Moussa — by the Islamic Republic of Iran is by peaceful means that would spare the region from the atrocities of warfare from which its people have suffered for the past three decades. Therefore, the United Arab Emirates reiterates its call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to reconsider its position and to respond to the peaceful initiative that we announced a few years ago, which calls on both countries to engage in serious bilateral negotiations or to resort to the International Court of Justice, as has been done in other bilateral issues that have been settled in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law.

The question of the three occupied islands, which belong to the United Arab Emirates, has been on the agenda of the Security Council since their occupation by Iran in 1971. In this regard, we reaffirm the complete sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates over Greater Tumb, Lesser Tumb and Abu Moussa and on their regional air space and waters, the continental shelf and the economic zone of the three islands, which are considered an indivisible part of the regional sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates calls on the Iranian Government to address this sensitive and important issue in a positive spirit in order to end the occupation. We hope that the current bilateral communications and meetings between the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran will lead to a solution that will cement

their good-neighbourly relations, enhance cooperation and mutual interests between the two countries, and strengthen the foundations of security, stability and prosperity in this important region.

Since the last session of the General Assembly, the world has witnessed many changes in the political and security fields that have had a strong impact on our international relations, especially those related to peace and security in the Arab Gulf region. This has had consequences and repercussions that may undermine the foundations of peace, stability and development in the area and the world.

The United Arab Emirates, which is deeply concerned about the continued suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people and the deterioration of their humanitarian, security, social, economic and environmental conditions, reaffirms that the restoration of security and stability in Iraq and the country's return to the international community will not be achieved without the collective efforts of the regional and international community to help the Iraqi people reform their constitutional and developmental institutions and to enable them to manage their internal affairs and external relations with their neighbours and other countries so that they can play their responsible and historic role in the region.

We therefore reiterate our expression of welcome and support for the efforts made by the provisional Iraqi Governing Council and the interim Iraqi Administration. We hope that the United Nations will play an increasingly important role in resolving the situation in Iraq; in its reconstruction; in maintaining its territorial integrity, unity and the right of its people to self-determination; in the election of its Government; in its political future; and in the exploitation of its natural resources.

The United Arab Emirates has been closely following the dangerous developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. We condemn the policies of targeted killings and closure being carried out by Israel, in violation of all relevant international and humanitarian laws. We therefore call upon the Quartet and on other influential countries to revitalize the peace process and to compel Israel to implement the road map, which stipulates an end to the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian State by 2005. The road map also calls on Israel to refrain from building illegal settlements and to ensure the return of the refugees.

We demand that Israel cease placing obstacles in the way of the implementation of the road map — obstacles such as the killing and destruction perpetrated by Israeli occupying forces against Palestinians and their property in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We also demand that Israel lift the unjust siege on President Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian people, dismantle the separation fence and release Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons.

A fair, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict requires a commitment by Israel to adhere to international resolutions, which are based on the principle of land for peace; the Arab peace initiative, endorsed by the Beirut Summit, including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks; and Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab lands occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Shaba'a Farms area.

The Middle East region, including the Arab Gulf, must be freed of all weapons of mass destruction, and Israel must join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subject its nuclear facilities to the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, pursuant to relevant United Nations resolutions.

The United Arab Emirates condemns all forms and manifestations of terrorism. We call for the mustering of national, regional and international efforts to combat and eradicate such a dangerous phenomenon, because it is exploited by radicals and outlaws as means to achieve their destructive goals.

In this respect, we express our deepest sorrow following the criminal attack perpetrated against the United Nations headquarters, as well as against the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad and against the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf, which resulted in the killing of Imam Mohammed Baqer Alhakeem and a number of innocent victims. We stand shoulder to shoulder with those countries that have been the targets of terrorist criminal attacks, in particular our brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We express our support for all the measures taken by Saudi Arabia to eradicate these terrorist activities.

In the meantime, we call on the international community to convene an international conference to tackle terrorism and eradicate its causes and tools. We also reaffirm the importance of respect for human rights, transparency and openness based on mutual respect of the cultural heritage and the beliefs of

peoples, so as to avoid creating a fertile breeding ground for frustration and hatred from which the terrorists derive their *raison d'être* and their motivation.

Despite the numerous international conferences, particularly the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the International Conference on Financing for Development, aimed at tackling the imbalance in international economic relations and its effect on international economic development, the majority of the world's people continue to live in unstable and inhuman conditions, characterized by increased poverty, the spread of disease and illiteracy, because of the increasing economic gap between developed and developing countries. Developed countries must commit to implementing the pledges they made according to international resolutions.

From this perspective, the United Arab Emirates calls on the international community to fulfil its commitment to providing development assistance to poor countries, in particular the least developed countries. International financial and development institutions as well as the private sector should plan strategies geared towards providing financial and development resources in order to implement economic development programmes in developing and poor countries, all within an environmentally friendly framework, ensuring access by such countries to new technologies, in order to alleviate the external debt burden and remove tariffs on international trade, which would benefit all countries of the world.

On this occasion, I cannot fail to point out the confidence placed in the United Arab Emirates by the international community through its hosting of the annual meeting of the heads of the International Monetary Fund and of the World Bank in the Emirate of Dubai, a meeting that concluded its work on 24 September. We are very satisfied with the outcome of that meeting, particularly the special attention it focused on the question of development and cooperation for the purpose of alleviating the impact of poverty and debt burdens around the world.

In conclusion, the grave challenges facing the international community today bolster our conviction more than ever of the importance of adhering to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, as our point of reference in resolving regional and international disputes and differences.

We express the hope that the meetings and debates held during this session of the General Assembly will succeed in strengthening the role of the United Nations as a multilateral Organization and in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia.

Mr. Ben Yahia (Tunisia) (spoke in Arabic): It gives me great pleasure to convey to you, Sir, and to your friendly country, Saint Lucia, our sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that your great skills and abilities will guarantee the success of our proceedings at this session. I also would like to express to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, deep appreciation for his remarkable stewardship of the fifty-seventh session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, our thanks and appreciation for his tireless efforts to strengthen the role of our Organization in order to enable it to attain its objectives of achieving peace, security and development in the world.

Since the opening of the previous Assembly session, the world has witnessed a series of developments that have contributed to the further deterioration of global security and stability. Crises and conflicts are proliferating, while there has been an increase in poverty and exclusion and in the spread of disease in many parts of the world. Faced with this array of challenges, the international community is called upon to assume its responsibilities and take resolute action. All Member States must renew their commitment to the noble principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, work together in the framework of an international consensus to strengthen the role of our Organization in the maintenance of peace and security and find solutions to current international issues. We are convinced that that is the best way to ensure that the world is governed by the principles of dialogue, cooperation and consensus.

The new challenges facing the international community and the necessity of establishing relations based on justice, equity and harmony, demand that we unite our efforts to ensure that the United Nations remains the framework for our common endeavours to

preserve peace and security — the embodiment of international law, to which all countries must be committed and which they must implement in a non-selective manner, without double standards.

These new challenges also require the United Nations to enhance its efficiency and improve its working methods, taking into account the noble principles enshrined in the Charter, by strengthening its main organs, particularly the Security Council, which must regain its credibility with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security, and by revitalizing and enhancing the role of the General Assembly in the interests of peace, security and development.

In this regard, we support the Secretary-General's call to accelerate the introduction of necessary reforms, and we stress that Tunisia, which has participated in the past in the debate on these reforms, stands ready to continue to contribute effectively to international efforts aimed at achieving this objective, which is now more urgent than ever.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We are convinced that the deterioration of the global situation requires the international community to adopt a comprehensive and multidimensional approach, based on the interdependence of peace and security on the one hand, and development on the other. We believe that peace and security cannot prevail throughout the world unless the development needs of all peoples are addressed. We also recognize that development cannot be achieved in the absence of security and peace for all.

Of course the pursuit of such an objective will require all members of the international community to pool their efforts and show greater solidarity so as to eliminate the root causes of tension and to eradicate poverty and deprivation, which are breeding grounds for trouble and instability.

Since the change of 7 November 1987, Tunisia has called for the adoption of such an approach and has presented, at the regional and international levels, numerous initiatives and proposals, whose objective is to build the foundation for a world with a greater capacity to attain the goal of peace, security and development and to spread the values of dialogue, tolerance and solidarity among all peoples.

In this context, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia called in 1989, from this lofty rostrum, for the conclusion of a pact for peace and progress in the framework of the United Nations, drawing together the countries of the North and the South and based on peace and justice and the strengthening of cooperation among all countries of the world.

All the initiatives and proposals put forward by the President of Tunisia since that date have been consistent with that call, as they stem from the determination of Tunisia and its President to ensure the effectiveness of our country's contribution to addressing issues of peace, security and development, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of terrorism and the means of combating it and to the implementation of mechanisms for conflict resolution in the Arab and African regions.

In line with the comprehensive character of the Tunisian approach, the President of Tunisia has consistently called on the international community to help developing countries strengthen their economies through a number of regional and international initiatives such as those related to debt relief, in particular debt recycling for middle-income countries; the transfer of science and technology to developing countries and a call for the convening of a world summit on the information society.

President Ben Ali also called for the dissemination of the values of solidarity and compassion as a means of contributing to the eradication of poverty, marginalization and exclusion in all parts of the world — a call that led to the establishment of the World Solidarity Fund.

Tunisia, which has succeeded in creating a secure, stable and well-balanced society that is integrated into the mainstream of the modern world, believes that the well-being of humankind is the ultimate objective and, on the basis of its own national experience, that the fight against extremism and terrorism, which constitute a serious threat to the entire world, cannot succeed unless it is comprehensive and multidimensional in nature and takes into account not only the security dimension but also the need to address the root causes of the phenomenon.

We therefore underscore the necessity of working to develop a common international approach to fighting the phenomenon of extremism and terrorism, taking into account all relevant international conventions.

In this context, pending the achievement of the necessary progress in the adoption of a comprehensive international mechanism to fight terrorism, we would like to reiterate Tunisia's call for the conclusion of a code of conduct to fight terrorism, to which all countries adhere and which will include the principles around which a consensus could be built. Such a code of conduct could constitute a common denominator in collectively confronting this phenomenon. An international conference could be convened to lay the groundwork for such a code of conduct.

The wide international support enjoyed by the proposal to establish the World Solidarity Fund testifies to the need for such a mechanism, which is aimed at reducing the suffering, poverty, exclusion and marginalization endured by a great number of peoples throughout the world, particularly in Africa.

While we reiterate our sincere gratitude to Member States for their support for this initiative, we remain convinced that, as the Fund was set up in February 2003 and has become one of the official mechanisms of the United Nations system, Member States will spare no effort in speeding up its operationalization, thus allowing it to begin its activities as soon as possible and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We therefore urge the international community and all relevant actors, including State and private organizations, to mobilize the necessary financial resources for the Fund so as to allow it to fulfil its noble humanitarian objectives. It is also imperative, in this regard, to speed up the establishment of the proposed high-level committee, whose task is to define the strategy of the World Solidarity Fund and to mobilize the resources needed for its activities.

The widening digital gap between industrialized and developing countries requires us to take the necessary practical measures to enable all countries of the world to take advantage of the broad prospects provided by the technological revolution in the field of communications. In that context, Tunisia called for the convening of a World Summit on the Information Society. We are now intensifying our preparation for the second phase of that Summit, which will be held in Tunis in November 2005.

While expressing its determination to contribute effectively to the first phase, which is due to be held in Geneva in December this year, Tunisia will do its

utmost to ensure that the Tunis summit will constitute an opportunity to elaborate a common approach, in order to contribute to strengthening cooperation between all members of the international community and to consolidate the role of information and communication technologies in development. We are confident that the member States that chose Tunisia to host the Summit will do their utmost to make the summit a success.

Convinced of the role of sports in strengthening the bonds of friendship, cooperation and rapprochement between peoples, and taking into account the importance of physical education as an instrument to consolidate the foundations of peace and promote development in the world, Tunisia decided to present to this session of the General Assembly a draft resolution proclaiming the year 2004 an international year of sports and physical education in the service of peace and development. We express the hope that this proposal, which has already received the support of the African Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, will get wide support from the international community and other international sports bodies.

The Middle East continues to suffer from a cycle of violence and tension. The road map, which Tunisia supported, revived hope for the resumption of the peace process. However, that hope was soon faced with Israel's insistence on imposing the reality of occupation and continuous military campaigns against the Palestinian people, including the decision to expel President Yasser Arafat, despite the Palestinian Authority's readiness to fulfil its commitments in the framework of the road map. In the face of the deteriorating situation, we believe that the international community, particularly the members of the Quartet, should not allow the will of peace to be defeated and should therefore spare no effort to enhance the peace process.

While reiterating its attachment to the peace process and its determination to contribute effectively to its success, Tunisia stresses the need to respect the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority and its leadership, chosen freely by the Palestinian people. We also believe that, given the continuing tragic conditions of the Palestinian people, it is high time to heed the call made by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali during the Extraordinary Arab Summit held in Cairo in October 2000 to provide the Palestinian people with international protection, particularly as that call was supported by many States.

The ongoing suffering of the Iraqi people is a source of great concern and profound preoccupation for the international community. While remaining attached to the principle of the independence and territorial integrity of Iraq, we wish to emphasize the need for the international community to join hands and for the United Nations to assume its central role to ensure that peace and stability prevail in that fraternal country, thus allowing for the start of reconstruction and the return to normal life for the Iraqi people.

In that regard, Tunisia hopes that the adoption of the first steps, which were welcomed by Security Council resolution 1500 (2003), will lead as soon as possible to restoration of the sovereignty of the Iraqi people. Furthermore, while condemning in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, we pay a tribute to the Secretary-General, who, despite the gravity of that painful attack, decided to let the United Nations continue to pursue its efforts of helping the Iraqi people overcome their present predicament.

Tunisia attaches great importance to the various forms of integration and partnership within the regional groupings it belongs to. In that regard, we avail ourselves of this opportunity to express our deep satisfaction following the agreement reached between sisterly Libya and the United States, Great Britain and France on the issues relating to the Lockerbie and Union de transports aériens incidents, following Tripoli's fulfilment of all its commitments under the relevant Security Council resolutions. We have no doubt that, now that the sanctions have been completely lifted, Libya will fully resume its role in the Maghreb and Mediterranean regions, thus contributing to reinvigorating the Arab Maghreb Union, which will help promote more complementarity and integration between the countries of the region and will consolidate the foundations of security, stability and prosperity in the Maghreb, Arab, African and Mediterranean areas.

The settlement of this dispute augurs well, as it coincides with the preparations Tunisia is undertaking to host the first summit of the 5+5 dialogue, to be held in December 2003, among the countries of the Maghreb and the European countries of the western Mediterranean. We look forward to this event as a step towards enhancing partnership between the countries of the region and deepening the values of dialogue, tolerance and moderation among the peoples of that region.

Convinced of the need to strengthen common Arab action and to consolidate the role of the League of Arab States to enable it to attain its noble objectives, Tunisia shall endeavour, during its presidency of the next Arab Summit in 2004, to further strengthen the bonds of cooperation, solidarity and complementarity among the Arab countries.

The most recent African Union Summit, held in Maputo in July 2003, marked the beginning of the launching process of the African Union. The African Union is determined to achieve the objective of revitalizing the African continent and to confront the serious challenges it faces. The Union hopes to get the necessary international support in order to achieve its goals.

Undoubtedly, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which is bringing a new vision for a serious and constructive partnership with the United Nations system, its specialized agencies, the developed countries and other relevant institutions, deserves the support of the international community. Such support constitutes an incentive for the African Union to attempt to meet legitimate African needs and address all aspects of marginalization in our continent.

The difficult global economic environment has had an adverse impact on the economies of the developing countries in general and the African economies in particular. Fierce trade competition and protectionist measures, as well as currency fluctuations and the exacerbation of the debt burden, constitute major constraints that have impeded progress of the developing countries.

In that regard, we emphasize the need for all international partners to show the political will necessary to implement the commitments of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, notably the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey and the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, if we are to overcome this difficult situation and provide fresh impetus to development efforts.

The difficult situation we face today should not discourage us or weaken our determination to achieve the objectives of peace, security and stability. We must show patience, resolve and perseverance and collectively pledge to strengthen the United Nations and make this session a new starting point for our

Organization in order to enable it to effectively play its role and respond to our collective aspirations for a more secure and stable world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien (Viet Nam): On behalf of the delegation of Viet Nam, I wish to warmly congratulate Julian Hunte on his assumption of the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. I believe that under his able guidance this session will come to a fruitful conclusion. I also take this opportunity to express our great appreciation for the significant contributions made by Mr. Jan Kavan during the previous session of the General Assembly.

Earlier last month, we were all shocked and shared in the boundless grief over the tragic demise of our dear Sergio Vieira de Mello, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and his colleagues in the barbarous bombing of the United Nations offices in Baghdad. We will not be discouraged by that loss. Instead, we should pursue even further the efforts of the United Nations to help the Iraqi people to restore stability and reconstruct their country.

We are living in a world full of events with profound implications for the various aspects of international life. They include the war in Iraq, the bombing of the United Nations offices in Baghdad, the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), increased violence in the Middle East, as well as continuing terrorist attacks in various parts of the world. Coupled with poverty, disease, floods, droughts and conflicts, they continue to take many innocent lives. This breaks our hearts and should not be condoned, especially when mankind has entered the third millennium of human civilization. We must make full use of the great achievements registered in the areas of science and technology and economy and trade, uphold the values of civilization, and serve the common development and prosperity of all nations.

Strengthening international peace and security and enhancing development remain our primary task. Only in an environment of peace and stability can nations concentrate their energy to meet the challenges of development and to achieve poverty eradication. Healthy, equitable international relations can be built only on the principles of the United Nations Charter

and international law, in particular the principle of respect for national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

Development cooperation and international economic and trade relations can be built only when all participate on an equal footing, on the basis of mutual benefit and with favourable assistance to developing countries. However, there continue to be certain egoistic tendencies that are contrary to that good. Protectionist measures, including anti-dumping measures, have been imposed to prevent developing countries' products from entering developed countries' markets. That runs counter not only to World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements but also to normal trade practices.

A typical case was that of the recent unfair lawsuit against the sale of Viet Nam's catfish in the United States market. The same story recurs in the case of cotton-growers in Burkina Faso and again in the case of indigenous cultivators of medicinal herbs in Brazil. These examples should serve as a further lesson that developing countries will always be at a disadvantage in the current international trade system, as the Secretary-General himself recently observed. By the same token, the failure to reach agreement at the fifth WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancun is truly regrettable. We must enhance efforts to restructure the world trade and financial systems to make them more democratic and open, giving developing countries a better chance.

Despite the considerable efforts by the United Nations to achieve the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration, there is still a long way to go to meet common needs and expectations. Today, global problems increasingly affect human security and survival. The SARS outbreak and AIDS were examples of how devastating such problems can be.

We must be resolute in solving global problems, especially those related to development, poverty eradication and disease prevention. Priority should be given to building cooperative frameworks based on reliable partnerships, mutual respect, shared responsibility and the serious undertaking of commitments. Practical and effective measures must be taken to pursue the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the commitments made at various international conferences. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General to elaborate a road map for the

implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. We also call upon developed countries to better fulfil the commitment of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross national product to official development assistance.

Multilateralism is crucial to resolving global issues. The United Nations, the universal Organization, continues to play an important role in the fields of peace and development and in building healthy international relations; to meet the confidence and expectations of nations, it must do so more effectively and practically. That requires a stronger and more democratic United Nations and Security Council, ensuring the better representation of the developing countries and those able to make a positive contribution to common objectives. I wish to reaffirm Viet Nam's support for Japan, Germany, India and other capable members from various continents being among the future permanent members of a reformed Security Council.

Following the events of 11 September 2001, the world has made great efforts to combat terrorism. The message is very clear: terrorism must be condemned and eliminated from human civilization. As this common fight may be long and arduous, we need to cooperate on the basis of the principles of the United Nations Charter, as well as to join in an endeavour to solve, *inter alia*, the problems of poverty, injustice and oppression, which give rise to terrorism.

Viet Nam supports international efforts aimed at disarmament and at the peaceful resolution of conflicts on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and legitimate interests of the parties concerned. We call for an end to embargoes and sanctions imposed against other countries, especially the unilateral embargo against Cuba that for many decades has caused its people to endure untold suffering.

Peace, security and reconstruction are now the most urgent tasks in Iraq. Viet Nam reaffirms its support for Iraq's independence and sovereignty. We hope that stability will soon be restored and that a Government chosen by the Iraqi people will be established at an early date so that they can focus on national reconstruction and development in keeping with their self-determination. The United Nations should continue its worthy, active role in resolving the Iraqi issue and in reconstructing the country. In that regard, Viet Nam has decided to contribute humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people.

Viet Nam reaffirms its consistent support for the just cause and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We call upon the parties concerned to exercise restraint, to persevere in negotiation and to accelerate their pace on the road to a just and durable peace in the Middle East that takes due account of the legitimate interests of the parties. Any unilateral action can only worsen the already volatile situation in the region.

Viet Nam supports peaceful efforts aimed at denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We hope that the negotiations initiated through the six-party talks in Beijing last August will lead to a satisfactory conclusion for the sake of peace, stability and development on the Peninsula, in the region and in the rest of the world.

In our region, faced with complex and rapid developments and challenges in the international and regional landscape, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has produced new initiatives and concrete steps to strengthen its solidarity, resilience and equitable development while further intensifying its relations with friends and partners abroad. At its forthcoming Summit, to be held early next month in Bali, Indonesia, ASEAN will redouble its efforts to realize ASEAN Vision 2020, the Hanoi Plan of Action and the Hanoi Declaration on narrowing the development gap for closer ASEAN integration.

As an outward-looking association, ASEAN continues to attach great importance to broadening and deepening its relations with other countries. China, Russia and India will accede to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South-East Asia, thus making the Treaty the code of conduct in inter-State relations. Having adopted the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, ASEAN and China are embarking on a search for concrete ways to implement the Declaration, thus contributing to confidence and cooperation in that important part of the world. In the economic field, ASEAN has been discussing closer economic partnership, including a possible free trade agreement, with its dialogue partners — the United States, the European Union, Russia and India, to name only a few.

Viet Nam consistently pursues a foreign policy of national independence, self-reliance, openness, diversification and multilateralization of international relations, and being a friend and reliable partner in the international community. Along those lines, Viet Nam

has increasingly enhanced friendly and cooperative relations with other countries as well as with regional and international organizations. At present, we are actively preparing for Viet Nam's early admission to the World Trade Organization. With an annual economic growth rate of approximately 7 per cent, a favourable and secure investment environment, hospitable people, beautiful landscapes and other rewarding discoveries, Viet Nam continues to be a most attractive country for investors and tourists. Later this year, we will host the South-East Asian Games, the largest sports event in the region. Next will be the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit in 2004, followed by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in 2006. We are confident that we will live up to expectations.

Today's challenges, both old and new, are becoming global; they require measures of a more global and multilateral nature. The United Nations therefore plays an important role in coordinating international efforts to effectively respond to those challenges and to work for peace and development. In that regard, the principles of the United Nations Charter must be upheld, and their actual implementation must be ensured. For its part, Viet Nam, as a responsible Member State and reliable partner, will continue to contribute actively to that common endeavour.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and la Francophonie of Gabon.

Mr. Ping (Gabon) (spoke in French): Permit me at the outset to express to Assembly President Julian Hunte the congratulations of my country, Gabon, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. Indeed, his election has symbolic value, since, through him, Saint Lucia has become — as he himself said — the smallest country ever to have occupied that high office. Is that not a perfect illustration of the universal vocation of the Organization, which recognizes the equality and rights of all its Members, small and large, but also their common responsibility in the conduct of the world's affairs? Gabon expresses to him its wishes for success in leading this session, and we assure him of our full cooperation. We also congratulate Mr. Jan Kavan, who preceded Mr. Hunte in his office, on the work that he accomplished. In addition, we thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the self-sacrifice and

courage with which he is leading the Organization at this time of grave world turbulence.

The extreme seriousness of the situation facing the world today sometimes leads the United Nations, when States are unable to carry out responsibilities that in principle devolve to them, to assume those responsibilities.

As the United Nations carries out its difficult mission, its authority, unfortunately, is quite often sorely tested, and the very lives of its personnel are threatened. The tragic death of Sergio Vieira de Mello, one of the torch-bearers of the ideals of the United Nations, and other staff members in Baghdad on 19 August is a dreadful reminder of just how fragile international peace and security are. Nevertheless, despite the delicate nature of the situation, the activities of the United Nations must be pursued in Iraq to assist in the reconstruction of the country.

Beyond Iraq, the future of the entire Middle East region must be at the centre of all our attention. The road map remains, despite current threats to its enforcement, the sole hope to restore peace between the parties to the conflict and sustainable regional balance to the Middle East. Gabon urges the two parties to end the violence and resume their dialogue.

Despite the persistence of some hotbeds of tension, the overall situation in Africa has witnessed positive changes. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the peace process has begun to be implemented with the creation in June 2003 of a Transitional Government, whose chief mission is the establishment of new democratic institutions and preparations for elections.

It goes without saying that the security and stability of the country continues to depend on that of the entire Great Lakes region. This is why Gabon ardently desires the completion of the Arusha process in Burundi. After a period of uncertainty, the Central African Republic is also restoring peace, particularly thanks to specific pacification measures taken by the country's new authorities.

To complement their efforts, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, which met in Libreville in June 2003, decided to make an ad hoc contribution of 5 billion francs CFA to the Central African Republic.

For its part, Gabon has always actively worked for peacekeeping and peace-building in Africa. This was recently demonstrated again in São Tomé and Príncipe, where the good offices of President Bongo and his African peers, particularly those from the Economic Community of Central African States, contributed to the restoration of constitutional order in the country.

Unfortunately, these welcome events are at variance with our inability to react promptly to some crisis situations that jeopardize collective security and cause gross violations of human rights. We must assume a two-fold duty today: to strengthen our collective means of conflict prevention and, when those efforts do not obtain results, to have the capacity to react swiftly to contain armed conflicts before their escalation brings about new humanitarian disasters, as was recently the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia.

African countries have shown their ability to manage crises on many occasions. But their will is most often impeded by the scarcity of human resources and lack of appropriate logistical means. To facilitate the prompt deployment of peacekeeping forces in these regions, should we not establish, under the auspices of the United Nations, a partnership between African countries and the developed countries that provide logistical support.

Because many conflicts are rooted in poverty, any effort to resolve them must be based on the quest for efficient solutions to the problems inherent in underdevelopment. The Monterrey Consensus, reaffirmed during the Johannesburg Summit, is based on the recognition that financing for development is a crucial element for an international strategy for sustainable development. The drop in private international investment in developing countries is liable to hinder them from truly recovering. Moreover, many of these countries, in particular those known as medium-income countries like Gabon, continue to devote huge resources to repay external debt. Gabon remains convinced that only a courageous strategy to defer or cancel debt would enable the economic recovery of the countries involved.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has become a development problem, also deserves our attention. The disease is now the leading cause of death among women and the young in Africa. In other words, its main victims are our nations' hope. We welcome the

fact that the high-level plenary debate that took place last week at United Nations Headquarters itself reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to combat this horrifying disease.

The ills that the world is facing should prompt us to identify the structural causes and find the best way to respond. This is particularly true with respect to the fight against international terrorism. One vital stage in this process is the establishment of a legal framework conducive to effective international cooperation.

We must finalize without delay the negotiations to adopt a universal convention against international terrorism in all its forms, including the issue of the acquisition of arsenals of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups.

The positive forces that drive our world towards greater integration and solidarity are increasingly jeopardized by growing threats. Because the new challenges of our world have a global impact, we must respond collectively. Only close coordination and active multilateral cooperation will enable us to meet them. It is within the United Nations, a high-level forum for dialogue and cooperation, that we can achieve this objective.

To do so, as we have stressed during the previous session, we must strengthen our Organization, particularly by restoring the role of the General Assembly and reforming the Security Council. We agree on the principle. May we thus have the courage and will to harmonize our views to attain this ideal of change and strengthen the multilateral dimension of our Organization.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Halldor Asgrimsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland.

Mr. Asgrimsson (Iceland): Allow me at the outset to congratulate the President on his election to the presidency of this General Assembly. The role of the President in providing overall leadership to the Assembly is crucial and I am confident he will guide us wisely through the complex tasks ahead of us.

A month from now, a group of young people will gather at the University of Iceland to take part in a model United Nations conference. It is good to see such enthusiasm for the ideals of the United Nations among young people — as well as a desire to experiment with how the United Nations machinery

works in practice. But I wonder whether their model will accurately reflect how our United Nations works. I am concerned that, if it does, will it increase or dampen their enthusiasm?

If they were to model the General Assembly, I suspect that their model would contrast in a number of ways with the real thing. Their agenda would be more concise. They would concentrate on pure and more immediate issues of urgency. They would have little time for often-repeated resolutions whose relevance is chiefly historical. They would not allow such items to crowd out more immediate matters. They would address the world as it is, not the world of yesteryear. To be honest, I am worried that the more accurately their United Nations model reflected the real thing, be it the General Assembly or the Security Council, the more difficult it would be to explain to those young idealists our purpose and convince them of our effectiveness.

As already stated by my Danish colleague, on behalf of the Nordic countries, I would very much like to welcome the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel of eminent personalities to make recommendations on issues ranging from peace and security to reform of United Nations structures. The General Assembly has tremendous achievements to its credit. It is, as we affirmed in our Millennium Declaration, the chief deliberative policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations. The achievements of the General Assembly in international norm-setting and in the establishment of an international legal framework is undisputed. Its potential is great but, as the young people at our United Nations model would bluntly point out, it needs fixing.

If we believe the General Assembly is where deliberation should be carried out, let us ensure that the agenda and procedures allow debate and deliberation to take place in an interactive manner. If we believe that it is the chief policy-making body, let us ensure that it develops policy, perhaps by linking debate more closely with the decision-making process. Policy needs to be followed-up; we need to do more on implementation. My delegation will contribute actively and constructively in the forthcoming deliberations on reforms of the General Assembly during this session.

Our young people at the United Nations model next month will in fact be modelling the Security Council. I suspect that they will raise some questions about the composition of that body. Iceland is seriously

concerned with the slow progress in the open-ended working group. Though it provides, for the time being, the appropriate forum for continued dialogue, Iceland would welcome any additional initiatives to further intensify the process towards satisfactory resolution of this important matter.

The Icelandic position on the reform of the Security Council is on record. It is essential that the membership of the Council better reflect the membership of the United Nations as a whole. At the same time, the efficiency of the Council must be preserved. Further steps should be taken to increase transparency in the decision-making process, in order to build on the welcome steps already taken by the Council.

Iceland supports an increase in both permanent and non-permanent seats at the Council. New permanent members should have the same rights and obligations as the current permanent members. The veto right should be restricted and an obligation to state the reason for its use should be established, including why a permanent member considers a matter to be of vital importance.

Iceland has, for the first time, put forward its candidacy for membership of the Security Council for the years 2009 and 2010. We see participation in the Security Council as a logical expression of our determination to fulfil our responsibilities within the United Nations and contribute as an active member of the international community.

The promotion and protection of human rights must be a central concern of all United Nations activities. In this regard, much more needs to be done to implement our commitment regarding the rights of women and the rights of the child. Iceland has signed the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons and has enacted legislation against trafficking in human beings. Iceland is working against the trafficking of women through a common campaign with the other Nordic countries and the Baltic States. The Icelandic campaign will focus on informing and increasing awareness among the public about this issue.

We should be especially aware of the implications for human rights of new threats and new policies. In particular, we must ensure that fundamental human rights are not violated in our counter-terrorist effort, as has been underlined by the Secretary-General.

In Iraq, the United Nations itself has recently been the target of two terrorist attacks. I would like to use this opportunity to express the most sincere condolences on behalf of the Icelandic Government to the United Nations and the families of the United Nations officials who lost their lives. I would also like to wish those who were wounded full recovery.

The United Nations and the Security Council in particular must address the issue of Iraq. Iceland, along with many other Member States, is contributing to Iraq's reconstruction and will continue to do so. The situation will demand all our resourcefulness and a concerted effort at cooperation by all parties in the Security Council to ensure that the people of Iraq are assured the destiny they deserve. This destiny should encompass peace and democracy, affording equal rights and justice to all Iraqi citizens.

On terrorists, renewed efforts must be made to reach an agreement on a universal definition during this General Assembly. Such a definition would make the fight against terrorists more effective.

It is estimated that close to 90 per cent of victims in today's armed conflicts are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children. Women and girls experience conflicts differently than men because of their status in society. Their rights must be protected in situations of armed conflict and we must ensure that women play a central role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace-building. United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) lays the ground rules for this to happen and must be implemented in all of its aspects.

It is our role to ensure that globalization benefits all countries, not least through targeted development cooperation. Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to be the focus of our bilateral development cooperation while we will also increase our contribution and involvement in multilateral development cooperation, especially through the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the World Food Programme.

I just returned, like many others, from Cancún, where we had difficult discussions on correcting the trade rules so that developing countries can operate on a more level playing field in world trade. This work is vital and we must push on with it. With determination we can break through the impasse that we reached in Cancún.

Iceland is one of the many island States in the world whose well-being and development is crucially affected by the state of the marine environment. Sustainable harvesting of living marine resources is the mainstay of our economy. Resolution 57/141, on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which was adopted during our last session, provides for the establishment of a regular process for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, commonly referred to as Global Marine Assessment, a concept that was initiated by Iceland in 1999.

An intergovernmental meeting should be convened in 2004 to decide upon the modalities of this process and negotiate an agreement between United Nations agencies. It is our sincere hope that such a meeting could turn out to be fruitful in the process of the establishment of the Global Marine Assessment.

We must craft for ourselves a United Nations which is task-oriented, representative, focused and coordinated. I believe strongly that the United Nations should not only be a place where we can talk about what we want to do, it must also be the place and instrument to get things done. We have taken note of the Secretary-General's call for changes in our institution by 2005.

There are varying opinions on how the United Nations should operate, but I believe there is a general recognition that the United Nations is, and must remain, the key forum in which we exercise our collective responsibility. At the Millennium Summit, heads of State and Government reaffirmed their faith in the Organization and its Charter as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. They defined our priorities for this century and resolved to make the United Nations a more effective instrument for pursuing all of these priorities. It is up to us, the Member States, to make it possible for the United Nations to realize these objectives.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Fiorenzo Stolfi, Minister for Foreign and Political Affairs of San Marino.

Mr. Stolfi (San Marino) (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of San Marino, let me congratulate Mr. Julian Hunte on his election to the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. His election brings us great satisfaction

since he also represents a small country, Saint Lucia, like ours.

I also wish to express my country's appreciation for the fruitful work and remarkable abilities of former Assembly President Jan Kavan. It has been a privilege for us to cooperate with him.

I cannot start my speech without mentioning the cowardly attacks on the United Nations offices in Baghdad, which took a heavy toll of lives including that of Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General in Iraq.

On behalf of the Government and people of San Marino, I take this opportunity to reiterate our most sincere condolences to the Secretary-General and the families of the victims. Furthermore, we would like to express our deep appreciation to the United Nations for the fundamental role it is playing in Iraq during this difficult transition period for the Iraqi people. The necessary conditions for social and economic development will be established only through security and stability, independence and democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

In light of the above, I wish to express the hope that the transitional Iraqi Governing Council, welcomed and supported by the Security Council, may operate efficiently so that Iraq can fully enjoy its right to self-determination, its own sovereignty and establish a democratic and representative Government, internationally recognized and able to guarantee the conditions necessary for the country's reconstruction.

We also hope that the United Nations may further strengthen its active humanitarian and civil role in favour of the Iraqi population, so as to contribute to the rebirth of that nation through democracy and development. We hope that all countries cooperating in Iraq to improve security and order, under the aegis of the United States of America, after assuring a decisive contribution to the liberation of the country from the previous regime, will reach an agreement with this Organization.

To this end, the drafting of a new Security Council resolution, the outcome of a lively debate that is going on now, would be a major political and diplomatic achievement. It would definitely pave the way to democracy and progress in Iraq and embody the will of many different Governments under the aegis of the United Nations.

In line with its tradition of solidarity, and as demonstrated in recent years through its support of humanitarian projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Middle East and in several African countries, often in the context of ad hoc programmes and United Nations special missions, my country will be pleased to contribute to the reconstruction process in Iraq. For the achievement of this objective, the forthcoming conference on the reconstruction of Iraq is particularly interesting.

The tragic, painful and unforgettable events of 11 September 2001 have also marked the proliferation of international terrorism and the escalation of terrorist attacks.

Today's gathering in this important forum is a clear indication of our country's position and its significance is increased by the universal character of this meeting.

The creation of the United Nations nearly 60 years ago, at the end of Second World War, attested to a unanimous desire for lasting peace and justice. I believe that at the beginning of the third millennium it is the responsibility of the Organization to reflect effectively the will of States to fulfil that original commitment and keep its original spirit alive through dialogue, mediation and cooperation. Conscious of this, San Marino reaffirms its decision to reject all forms of terrorism and to contribute fully to its defeat, as testified to by the Republic's accession to several international instruments of the United Nations and European organizations.

Likewise, San Marino has promptly followed up on Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and will continue to monitor terrorism at the national level, as can be noted by the implementation of the guidelines to combat the phenomenon of terrorism and its related aspects.

Unfortunately, it is evident that terrorism, aside from being inspired by fanaticism and fundamentalism, is too often linked to underdevelopment and injustice; their victims can, in turn, become instruments of violence and oppression. However, terrorism can also be countered through the active support of international cooperation programmes to overcome disparities, poverty, discrimination, the violation of the rights of individuals and peoples, a total absence of opportunities, and, as a result, hopelessness, in particular among the young, who are the future of mankind.

Our collective efforts to restore favourable conditions for dialogue and mutual acceptance must not be weakened by the growing concern of persistent, serious obstacles to the road map for peace in the Middle East, where negotiations and agreements are being jeopardized by renewed terrorist attacks, hatred and retaliation. We are convinced that the Israeli and Palestinian peoples must be ensured the indisputable right to live freely in their own territory, where they can exercise their full sovereignty in security and peace.

The success of the globalization process under way will ultimately depend on achieving peace and development for all. Within the framework of effective global cooperation, the role played by San Marino is inextricably linked to its tradition of freedom, independence and democracy. Those principles, which have characterized the Republic's 1700 years of existence, continue to inspire its international policy today.

In 1854 San Marino became the first European country to ban the death penalty. My country believes that this issue, which is so important and topical, must remain a top priority for the General Assembly, even though it is not on the agenda for this session.

In the field of human rights, the ethics of diversity requires the acceptance of the human condition. In that spirit, San Marino has followed with special attention the negotiations within the working group for the drafting of an international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

San Marino continues to pay great attention to the follow-up given to initiatives on HIV/AIDS being carried out by the United Nations and to the search for adequate responses so as to prevent the spread of new epidemics such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). San Marino is also following with great interest the work of the working group for the drafting of an international convention against the reproductive cloning of human beings, spurred by the conviction that the cloning of human beings is an immoral and inhuman degeneration of biotechnological development and that such an abhorrent practice would be contrary to human dignity. The important ethical and moral implications of this issue cannot be separated from purely scientific questions. We hope that the United Nations will continue to strive for the protection of the fundamental rights of human beings.

Additionally, in the area of human rights, San Marino recently extended a standing invitation to the

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit the Republic whenever necessary in order better to carry out its mandate.

I wish to recall that San Marino was the first Western European country to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court, confident that the Court would satisfy the widespread desire for justice and put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes against the international community as a whole. Let me also express our best wishes to the Court, which is composed of authoritative judges, and convey our hope that it will now be able to work in accordance with the objectives of justice, security and peace on which it is based. We are confident its work will be fruitful and that it will always act independently and impartially.

All the objectives set out in the Millennium Declaration could be achieved if an additional \$50 billion per year were granted for development assistance, at a time when global military expenditures total \$850 billion. We also wish to express our appreciation for the positive achievements of United Nations peacekeeping missions deployed to many areas of the world afflicted by conflicts. Such results should encourage Governments to increase their support for those missions, which promote lasting, sustainable peace and the re-establishment of democracy and the rule of law.

San Marino will continue to participate in joint action for the total elimination of anti-personnel mines. In that context, San Marino urges countries that have not yet done so to accede to the Ottawa Convention.

The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004 will provide further incentive to reflect on and analyse the living conditions of our populations, paying particular attention to children, the elderly and the most vulnerable in our societies. Such groups deserve greater consideration from society. Society must promote effective projects for education, solidarity and adequate support.

Only a few days ago, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child reviewed San Marino's initial report on its implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The relevant measures now in force will soon be supplemented by new ones in support of the family.

In underlining the validity of the reform programme started by the Secretary-General, we deem

it necessary to continue efforts to reform the General Assembly, which is the most representative body of our Organization. Indeed, the Assembly should enjoy greater authority. We hope that agreement can also be reached on Security Council reform, and San Marino reiterates its support for the inclusion of a larger number of non-permanent members, in order to make the Council more representative and democratic.

Let me stress once again my country's appreciation for and commitment to activities carried out by the United Nations in building a world of peace, solidarity and development.

It is in that spirit that this morning I signed three important international instruments: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, recently adopted at the fifty-sixth Assembly of the World Health Organization and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aimed at abolishing the death penalty.

We need to continue our action at the international level despite all the difficulties and tensions that exist, bearing in mind that our joint efforts are essential to finding a solution to the emergencies and concerns of today. Bringing about the necessary changes, we will be able to reconfirm the validity of the basic principles of this Organization. We will responsibly set the conditions for our future and thus meet the expectations of our peoples and our hearts.

While expressing my best wishes to you, Mr. President, to the Secretary-General and to all United Nations officers, as well as to all Member States, I assure them that San Marino will be at their side in meeting all of these challenges.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Soledad Alvear Valenzuela, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile.

Mrs. Alvear Valenzuela (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I congratulate Mr. Hunte on his election as President of this Assembly. As the Foreign Minister of St. Lucia, a member of the Latin American and Caribbean community, he can be especially assured of the full cooperation of the delegation of Chile.

The events of 11 September 2001, the crisis in Iraq, the conflict in the Middle East and the attack on the United Nations in Baghdad all pose enormous challenges for the international community. Tensions

have arisen over the way in which we have responded to some of these crises, but opportunities have also been created for joint action in new areas. We must confront these challenges with seriousness of purpose and a collective approach.

The Secretary-General has expressed his concern at the differing perceptions of the new and old threats and the urgent need to develop a programme of security aimed at building a common destiny. The United Nations will be what its Member States wish it to be. The success of the Organization will be the success of its Members and its failure will be the responsibility of none other than its Member States. The United Nations can and must play a central role in building a common destiny based on universally shared principles and values. The renewal of the United Nations is therefore an urgent task that must be approached from a lofty political and ethical perspective and not from the bureaucratic standpoint that has led to stagnation, empty rhetoric and frustration of the desire for change.

According to our Charter, faith in human rights is a core value of every society and culture. It is essential for us vigorously to promote its universality. We note with concern how the progress made by mankind in promoting these values is accompanied by reversals that frustrate the sense of ethics that we wish to impart to the global community.

The work of the United Nations must continue to be a guarantee for the promotion and protection of human rights and for the strengthening of a culture that guides the conscience of each individual, each people and each nation. Democracy is consistent with the purposes and principles of this Organization.

In our region, we have made progress towards the inculcation of these values. The historic Santiago Commitment to Democracy of 1991 culminated in the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and has been complemented by the Declaration of Santiago on Democracy and Public Trust: A New Commitment to Good Governance for the Americas, which was adopted at the thirty-third General Assembly of the Organization of American States, held in Chile in June this year. In that instrument, we reaffirmed the vital role of multilateral cooperation in promoting democratic governance. This effort is an example of how international cooperation can help to strengthen the universal value of democracy.

Chile's commitment to democracy goes beyond our region. We and other countries are part of the Community of Democracies, an initiative aimed at promoting and strengthening this system of coexistence throughout the world. We hope to work in the United Nations in pursuit of these objectives.

International peace and security continue to be key concerns of our Organization. The sacrifice of the Brazilian and Latin American Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Baghdad, and of his colleagues reaffirms our commitment to working on behalf of peace.

The United Nations must play a more substantive role in the future of Iraq. We must work to ensure the rapid restoration of sovereignty to the Iraqi people so that they can freely build their future. Chile stands ready to continue to work in the Security Council with an approach that will permit progress to be made towards the consensus that is needed to improve the conditions of security and to establish a clear timetable for political transition in that country.

Security must guarantee people a life free from threats. Human security thus emerges as a distinctive feature and a prerequisite for a world without fear. We share the ideas of the Secretary-General for the elaboration of a programme of common security that will permit us to overcome the differences that have arisen in dealing with the increasing fears of our global community.

Globalization has created new opportunities for the peoples of the world, but it has also created imbalances as a result of unequal access to the advantages that it offers. The equity perspective must therefore be a key component of this programme of security. Development in the globalized world can no longer be sustained only in terms of technological innovation and economic growth. Progress must be aimed at ensuring that technological development is placed at the service of integration and collective prosperity.

In this spirit, we look forward to broad participation in the Global Biotechnology Forum, to be held in the Chilean city of Concepción in March 2004, and to an outcome that will help to further strengthen international cooperation in one of the most dynamic fields of science and technology.

Our political and economic multilateral institutions were created in a different historical period. We must now

demonstrate our capacity to adapt them to better respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century. Our main concern today must be how to overcome our immobility and embark upon a process of renewal. The method used thus far has not yielded the desired results. It is therefore necessary to explore new alternatives.

We warmly welcome the initiative of the Secretary-General to establish a group of eminent personalities to elaborate a proposal for submission to the Organization. It is essential to address the weaknesses of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. We must also reflect on what new functions could be entrusted to the Trusteeship Council. We must strengthen the dialogue between these organs and extend it to other international organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and regional organizations. In order to go forward in this process of renewal, we must be able to utilize the full potential of the Charter, which has not been fully exploited.

The Security Council has recently gone through a critical period. We have witnessed the difficulty it has had in discharging the responsibilities entrusted by the Charter to this vital organ for the maintenance of international peace and security. We are in favour of its revitalization, in order that an appropriate balance can be achieved between representativity and effectiveness.

Reform must give consideration to the addition of new members, both permanent and non-permanent, and include a review of the veto. This process can be complemented by mechanisms that will allow, within the framework of the Charter, more active participation by countries that are not members of the Council.

It is also necessary more effectively to involve the principal organs in the consideration of issues affecting international peace and security. This must be done in a coordinated manner through the effective application of the Charter, as provided for in Article 15 thereof.

It is necessary, too, more actively to involve regional organizations and arrangements in efforts to maintain peace and security by applying Chapter VIII of the Charter. The region of the Americas has an institutional structure and various coordination mechanisms that can be used to contribute to the fulfilment of the purposes of the United Nations. The experience of the Organization of American States is pertinent in this regard.

The General Assembly must undertake a process of revitalization in order to be able to play its role effectively as the principal deliberative, normative and representative organ of the United Nations.

The Assembly has a multiplicity of items on its agenda and has adopted many resolutions, most of which remain unimplemented, thereby affecting the effectiveness and credibility of the system as a whole. We must have the political will to implement our decisions. In short, we must strengthen the capacity of the Assembly to assume political leadership. We must also promote the establishment of regional agendas that facilitate agreements and global consensus.

The United Nations must play a key role in the promotion of equitable development by increasing the Organization's capacity to influence the design and implementation of national and international public policies in the economic and social spheres.

The process of revitalization of the Economic and Social Council must be aimed at repositioning that organ. This will require the streamlining of its agenda, methods of work and membership, and the strengthening of its relationship with the Security Council, as provided for in Article 65 of the Charter, through its assumption of a role in the prevention and containment of threats originating in social problems.

We must seek to ensure that the search for consensus does not prevent this forum from reaching the necessary substantive agreements required for the achievement of the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Chile, from the southern part of the world, will continue to shoulder its responsibility to make a contribution to the international community.

The United Nations is a unique and indispensable forum for building a world of peace and development for all. Its core values must inspire efforts for a renewal that will permit the Organization, in the building of our common destiny, to rise to the challenges of the century upon which we have just embarked.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. João Bernardo de Miranda, Minister for External Relations of Angola.

Mr. Miranda (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): I would like to start by congratulating Mr. Julian Hunte on his

election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eight session. We wish him great success in the fulfilment of this difficult and lofty task.

The current session is taking place at one of the most troubled times in our era. The recent events in the Gulf region were a severe test of the capacity and readiness of the United Nations to provide appropriate responses to the challenges presently faced by the international community. The impact of these events somehow diminished the cohesion of our world Organization and weakened trust among its Members. There was a failure in the international security system, which puts us in the position of needing immediately to make it more effective.

In fact, the present international security system, created after the last great war — despite having to date prevented the outbreak of a new world conflict — has shown signs of an incompatibility in the global collective security interests of the Members of the United Nations in relation to the new challenges of this millennium.

We are in urgent need of an integrated system capable of dealing effectively with the major threats to international stability at the outset of this twenty-first century, specifically terrorism and international organized crime; weapons of mass destruction; internal conflicts, which, unfortunately, continue to plague the African continent in particular; generalized poverty; and HIV/AIDS.

Terrorism is today the most direct threat to the security of our countries, as can be seen from the attacks that in the past two years have killed thousands of civilians in the United States, Russia, Africa and Asia.

With regard to armed conflicts, the situation continues to require urgent attention. During the last decade, approximately one third of African States were either directly or indirectly affected by internal conflicts, which resulted in costs as high as \$15 billion a year, and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, massive displacements of people, famine and malnutrition, and the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

The prevalence of conflicts in Africa is not only the result of the divisions inherited from the post-colonial period and the cold war and of ethnic and religious differences. It is also a consequence of factors such as the fragility of national institutions, the marginalization of the African continent from the

world economy, the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the resulting arms proliferation, and the weak monitoring of national borders. This situation must be swiftly reversed, since it can endanger the future of millions of Africans and increase the risk of certain areas of the continent's becoming true sanctuaries for terrorist organizations.

Improving United Nations political institutions and security systems constitutes the most effective method of addressing the threats facing humankind. It is therefore necessary to establish new mechanisms outside of the traditional strategic doctrines. The international legal documents created by the United Nations, and the current alliances between States, have proved insufficient to respond adequately and in a consensual manner to such threats, particularly when they are posed by entities that are not themselves States.

Because of its universal nature, the United Nations plays a central role in the management of current and future challenges. But that is not enough. It is crucial that that role be performed within a more democratic and participative framework, particularly with regard to major decisions on international peace and security.

Iraq and other parts of the Middle East are the main hotbeds of tension in the world today, and the combined efforts of the United Nations are being focused on that region. The continued loss of life in Iraq — with most of those killed being innocent civilians, including United Nations officials, among them the late Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello — is a reminder of the need for increased support by the international community to ensure the security of the Iraqi people, the building of new institutions and the beginning of the reconstruction of the country.

The will of the international community, and certainly that of the Iraqi people, is for Iraq to become, as soon as possible, a viable, democratic State with institutions validated by its people, and a country living in peace with its neighbours.

The achievement of this goal implies the establishment of a political and institutional framework in which the United Nations plays an active role, specifically in the pacification and unification of the country; in the internal political dialogue; in the process of national reconciliation; and in the establishment of new democratic institutions.

Angola hopes that the present convergence of positions among the members of the Security Council on the role of the United Nations in Iraq will facilitate an understanding relative to the transitional process in general and to the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi people.

Angola deplores the loss of civilian life and the material damage caused by the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East. The rekindling of violence between Palestinians and Israelis represents the greatest danger to the implementation of the road map for peace, whose ultimate objective is the signing of an agreement for the creation of an independent, viable Palestinian State, living side by side and in peace with Israel and its other neighbours. In our view, that is the only solution capable of putting a definite end to the cycle of violence.

The end, last year, of the armed conflict in Angola, and the success of the peace process, are among the most extraordinary political achievements seen in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years. With the attainment of peace in Angola, the Southern African region became, for the first time in several decades, a zone free from conflict, and it can now focus its human and material resources on reconstruction and development efforts.

Angola today is a country in its post-conflict stage. It is committed to the tasks of overcoming the heavy burden of a 40-year conflict, focusing on the strengthening of its democratic process — which even during the difficult war period was never abandoned by the Government — and fully resuming its legitimate role within the regional and international context.

As a result of the impact of the conflict on the human, economic, social and financial structures of the country, and given the inequities inherited from our colonial past, the current post-conflict stage — which will lead to the building of a new society in Angola — is a difficult and painful one, and this has been an obvious impediment to an immediate response to the legitimate aspirations of Angolan citizens.

The challenges that confront Angola are enormous — perhaps immeasurable. The main challenges include the resettlement of more than 4 million displaced persons and 450,000 refugees; the social reintegration of more than 80,000 former military personnel and their respective families; the resolution of the problem of absolute poverty, which now afflicts more than half

of the Angolan population; and the reconstruction of the social and economic infrastructure.

At the same time, in spite of the scarcity of available resources, we are creating the necessary conditions to hold elections in the near future. Despite our numerous problems and challenges, there is hardly any assistance from the international community for Angola, as compared with other countries in similar circumstances, some of which received an immediate response to their appeals, even though they lacked de jure institutions. We would like to believe that such treatment is not the result of any form of discrimination against our country.

There is no example in modern history of a State, rich or poor, that, in the aftermath of a devastating and destructive war such as that which afflicted Angola, has managed to overcome the burden left by such a war and rise again without outside assistance. In Angola, this reconstruction effort has, up to now, been borne solely by the Angolans themselves, in spite of the reiterated promises that the only factor that hindered the supply of aid to our reconstruction was the pacification of our country.

We hereby renew, therefore, our appeal to the international community to help Angola in its domestic reconstruction effort. To this end, my delegation will submit a draft resolution on international assistance and the reconstruction and economic development of Angola, which proposes that an international donor conference be convened. We are counting on the support of the Assembly.

Angola also welcomes the progress made in the area of peace and security in other regions of the continent, especially the Democratic Republic of Congo. The role of Angola, as well as that of its partners, was crucial in preventing a situation of chaos and disintegration in the territory of that brotherly country, with which we share a long border, and in convincing the parties to give up war and choose instead a negotiated political solution.

The Congolese patriots have shown signs of great maturity in guaranteeing the success of the peace process and the transformation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo into a viable country that does not constitute a threat to the stability of its border regions.

Angola will continue to be open to strengthening the traditional relations of friendship and cooperation it

has maintained with the authorities of the interim Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as with future authorities that are legitimately elected by popular vote.

There is still a stalemate with regard to the situation in the Western Sahara. Difficulties regarding the holding of a referendum on the self-determination of the territory are a hindrance to the search for a definitive solution to this question. Angola urges the parties involved to show flexibility and seek a political solution that enables the people of that territory to decide freely about their own destiny.

Today, as one part of the world, particularly the industrialized countries, enjoys considerable wealth, 40 per cent of the 600 million Africans continue to survive on less than one dollar a day. In fact, Africa continues to show the lowest social and economic development indicators, and those levels are becoming even worse, due to the marginalization of the African countries in the progress of globalization and within the world economy, where trade and capital share are only 1 per cent.

Africa is also the continent that benefits the least in terms of foreign direct investment, receiving only 7 per cent of the investment targeted at the developing countries. External debt has been a huge obstacle to the development process because repayment of the debt service alone has depleted the already-limited national resources of the African States. Angola supports the cancellation of the external debt service of the least developed countries, particularly those in the African continent.

The macroeconomic measures imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions within the framework of the structural adjustment programme have not always been able to help the African continent overcome its international economic problems. In many cases, that has led to controversial results. Based on such results, experience has shown that, in fact, the financial institutions very often do not take into account the idiosyncrasies of each country and frequently put the Governments in the position of choosing between meeting the conditions imposed by the financial institutions or meeting the real needs of their people.

Angola hopes that, with the establishment of the African Union and the launching of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the tragic situation in which the African continent finds itself today can be alleviated by setting priorities and giving

special attention to immediate economic development issues.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Roy Chaderton-Matos, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela.

Mr. Chaderton-Matos (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I begin this speech with mixed emotions — happiness over the election of our friend Julian Hunte — Minister of our sister country in the Caribbean, Saint Lucia — as President of this body; and pain, because our United Nations lost one of its best people, as did Brazil, an exemplary member of one of the world's soundest diplomatic systems. Sergio Vieira de Mello died for peace and human rights, causes that illuminated his life as a diplomat and a Brazilian.

There are other unfortunate examples from other times. We lost Anna Lindh, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and daughter of the one of the countries most closely linked to social justice, who was educated in the Nordic tradition of social advancement and commitment to peace and democracy. Years earlier, another Swede — Olaf Palme — died, a man of peace and good will, to whom the international community bade farewell with the song of Chilean Violeta Parra, *Gracias a la vida*, as a tribute to his struggles on behalf of the persecuted, the disenfranchised and the impoverished.

At the beginning of the 1960s, while on a peace mission, United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, also from Sweden, died in what was apparently an accident, amid the tangled, political turbulence in a Congo assailed by its enemies at home, as well as international factors that were depriving its sovereign leadership of vital oxygen. Still earlier, Count Folke Bernadotte — also Swedish — was a victim of terrorism while on a peace mission for the United Nations in Jerusalem. Even before that, at the end of the Second World War, Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who, from Budapest, opened the way to freedom for Jews who were being persecuted by Nazi barbarity, disappeared without a trace.

It seems that nothing has changed. Social injustice goes on forever. Conflicts repeat themselves. The protagonists of historic change are physically eliminated or morally destroyed. The advocacy of violence is dragging us towards terrorism and war.

Inspired by the values of social justice, democracy and peace, on behalf of the President of the

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frias, I wish to reaffirm our support for the United Nations from a position that is critical yet unambiguous and totally consistent with its loftiest goals. These same values inspire us in Venezuela, a country that prided itself on being the richest and most democratic nation in Latin America, but that squandered its privileged historical opportunities and fell into a process of ethnical and social decay that has brought us close to the abyss. As a result, we had to assume a profound process of transformation towards peace and democracy.

The sectors affected by the democratic transformation have resorted to force to frustrate this commitment of the majority. They have resorted to military coup, oil sabotage, financial panic and media terrorism. Thank God that they failed, but they still caused much damage.

The provisions of a Constitution approved by the people in a referendum that expands the basis of democracy in a social State founded on law, and which is truly our country plan for all, have generated violent and anti-democratic opposition. Opening the way to participatory democracy and to an economy that is free, yet not anarchic, and that protects private freedoms without bowing to the almighty market, has stirred up the most egoistic and insensitive sector of our country and of the international community — the neoliberals. On this subject, His Holiness Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, of March 1967, said

"This unchecked liberalism leads to dictatorship rightly denounced by Pius XI as producing 'the international imperialism of money'. One cannot condemn such abuses too strongly by solemnly recalling once again that the economy is at the service of man."

Entrepreneurs who took no risks, protected by a colluding Government under a captive market, who did not compete and who evaded taxation promoted a conspiracy against the legitimate Government of Venezuela, allied with international sectors that had been past beneficiaries.

Now, therefore, our democracy, threatened unsuccessfully by certain Venezuelan media magnates, invites members of the international community to see for themselves in Venezuela the strength of our society and the immense civil liberties available in our country, including the broadest freedom of expression in our entire hemisphere. We will welcome witnesses to come

to Venezuela and watch our television, read our newspapers, interview the owners of the private media, listen to commentators and news anchors, and draw their own conclusions. We need them to familiarize themselves with the most hidden threat against democracy: the media dictatorship, a mirror of the culture of violence and mediocrity.

Our process of social change in peace and democracy was interrupted by an assault against legality by the media and their hypnotized followers. In scarcely three days, during their ephemeral *de facto* Government, all democratic institutions were abolished, before people and soldiers in the streets restored normalcy. Today, we aspire to peace and reconciliation among Venezuelans. In our democracy, there is room and hope for everyone.

We want also peace for our sister Colombia and in Northern Ireland, in the Balkans, between Jews and Palestinians and throughout the world. Peace is also the aspiration of the Members of the United Nations, but there will not be lasting peace without social justice; there will not be stable democracies without social justice; and freedom will be a fraud without social justice.

We congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his balanced and firm guidance of the Organization at the very difficult time that the world is passing through and on his wise and heartfelt message to this democratic Assembly.

This year, our activities in the General Assembly are overclouded by the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, where so many faithful servants of the Organization lost their lives, by the aftermath of the war and the tense situation existing in the Middle East and by the alarming world poverty indices, a scenario that leads us to profound reflection and demands that we strengthen the Organization's capacity to respond.

Venezuela's action has been aimed at restoring and promoting multilateralism as a means and a blueprint for the shaping of a more democratic world. Unilateralism is monochromatic, worn out, oppressive and authoritarian; multilateralism is polychromatic, animated, tolerant and democratic. In that conviction, we assumed the responsibility of chairing the Group of 77 last year and the Group of 15, whose summit meeting we will hold next year in my country. There are mechanisms through which the developing world is expressing its multilateral voice and its aspirations to the universal common good and to international social justice.

Historical developments since 1945 require that we have a more democratic and more representative Security Council. We must strengthen the General Assembly given its democratic and participatory nature. We want the Economic and Social Council to be the powerful organ that it has not been allowed to be.

The Charter of the United Nations cannot be tailored to suit unilateral conveniences. War is not a romantic adventure that brings us to a happy ending in which the superheroes defeat the villains. Sometimes, war turns into a death trap that causes harsher suffering than the suffering that, in theory, it intends to alleviate. Sometimes, it brings other wars, more violence and more terrorism.

Use of force by the State should not be undertaken at the discretion of those who happen to be interested at the time. The responsibility of the Organization's Members is collective, as the international security that we want to protect and guarantee must be. We all desire a better world for future generations, and why not for ourselves? We are all protagonists in this world drama; hegemonies appear archaic and authoritarian. Our objective is a strengthened, universal and democratic Organization.

A year ago in this Hall, we condemned the abominable terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, in which we lost thousands of citizens of the United States and of other countries. That sudden holocaust was perhaps the product of religious fundamentalism, but it is unjust to single out the believers of one faith for acts of extremist minorities when other minorities of believers have also committed crimes against humanity in the name of the Lord. Terrorism destroys human lives, both of innocents and of combatants; it torments family members, friends and peoples. There is no good terrorism, not in the name of an ethnicity or of a nationality; not in the name of justice or of freedom; not in the name of God.

Four days ago, on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I deposited the ratification instruments of the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Yesterday, the Venezuelan Parliament made the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism a law of the Republic. We hope that

the ratification procedure will be completed within the Organization of American States as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, we must continue the frontal assault on the most widespread and destructive forms of terrorism: poverty and social exclusion. The developing world is suffering from hunger, poverty and exclusion caused by an unjust economic system enveloped in the practices of savage neo-liberalism and in the globalized economy with an unfair scheme of commercial trade that generates unemployment, exploitation, inequality and resentment. It is a system that attacks the dignity of the human person. Its leaders are not accustomed to speaking of social justice in their statements.

One initiative that the President of Venezuela has undertaken to fight poverty is the creation of an international humanitarian fund that we proposed at the International Conference on Financing for Development, held at Monterrey; at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held at Johannesburg; and once again in the General Assembly. The fund is designed to be a consistent and innovative source for financing non-refundable resources coming from the reduction of military expenditures and money confiscated as a result of narco-trafficking and corruption. It will be an effective formula of international assistance to generate opportunities for economic and social progress in countries excluded from traditional financing schemes. Converging proposals make us optimistic in the light of this type of initiative.

I conclude with a quotation from His Holiness John Paul II in 1994:

"The world longs for peace and has a desperate need of peace. Yet wars, conflicts, increasing violence and situations of social unrest and endemic poverty continue to reap innocent victims and to cause divisions between individuals and peoples. At times peace appears a truly unattainable goal! In a climate made cold by indifference and occasionally poisoned by hatred, how can one hope for the dawn of an era of peace, which only feelings of solidarity and of love can usher in?"

That is how all Members of the Organization should concentrate our efforts to find the necessary means that will enable us to ensure peace and democracy at home and in the international community, availing ourselves of the best antidote to violence: social justice.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting. However, one representative has requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind members that statements made in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to ten minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Najafi (Islamic Republic of Iran): This afternoon the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates raised some unacceptable claims against the territorial integrity of my country. Since we have clearly and repeatedly put on record our position on this issue on previous occasions, I need not go into details.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully committed to its international obligations, especially those arising from the agreement of 1971. We firmly believe that misunderstandings over its interpretation or implementation, if any, should be addressed with good will through mutually agreed mechanisms in order to find an amicable solution.

Meanwhile, my Government has always welcomed the interaction and exchange of views between Iranian and United Arab Emirates officials on issues of interest and concern to both countries. In that respect, we are pleased that talks have continued, talks in which the two parties can discuss bilateral and regional issues and take a number of positive steps to address them. We believe that dialogue between our two Governments can play a determining role in removing any existing misunderstandings.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our disappointment at the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran with respect to the three occupied islands, Greater and

Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa. The United Arab Emirates deeply regrets the continued false claims made by the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to change the legal, political and historical status quo of those three islands since their occupation by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1971. We consider that unbalanced policy of the Iranian Government to be a clear violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter, provisions of international law and the bases on which good-neighbourly relations are conducted.

We ask ourselves why the Islamic Republic of Iran has refused over the past years to respond positively to the peaceful initiatives taken by my country, which has called for serious and direct bilateral negotiations to guarantee the just settlement of this issue, or to remit the case to the International Court of Justice. We have repeatedly declared that we are ready to accept any legal ruling or opinion issued by the International Court of Justice. We consider Iran's rejection of such a step to be a result of the weakness of the legal and political arguments it employs to perpetuate its continued illegal occupation of our three islands.

My country possesses legal, historic and demographic proof of our national sovereignty over these islands. Once again, we hope that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran will reconsider its policy and seriously take up my country's reasonable and wise proposal for a just, equitable and comprehensive settlement of this issue, restoring the three islands to the United Arab Emirates. If that were done, it would foster relations of good-neighbourliness and cooperation between our two peoples and countries and strengthen peace, security, stability and progress in the entire region.

The meeting rose at 7.30 p.m.



General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

15th plenary meeting

Monday, 29 September 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Participation of Palestine in the work of the General Assembly

The President: Before turning to the items on our agenda for today, I should like to draw the attention of delegates to a matter concerning the participation of Palestine in its capacity as observer at this session and in the work of the General Assembly.

In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and 52/250 of 7 July 1998, and with the note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/1002, Palestine, in its capacity as observer, will participate in the work of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly with no further need for a precursory explanation prior to any statement.

Address by Mr. Dragan Cović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The President: The Assembly will hear an address by the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Dragan Cović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Dragan Cović, Chairman

of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

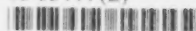
President Cović (*spoke in Bosnian; English text provided by the delegation*): It is my great pleasure and honour to address the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. At the outset, allow me, Sir, to extend my sincere congratulations on your election and to wish you every success in presiding over the Assembly at this session.

Even though we entered the new millennium with clear resolve to work for a better future, sharing a vision of global solidarity and common security, which we expressed in the Millennium Declaration, we are witnessing an increase in tragic events, which occur almost daily. The tragedy that took place on 19 August in Baghdad is forcing us to reconsider the true accomplishments and values of civilization today and to re-examine the connections between poverty, development, self-sustainability, respect for human rights and the quest for true progress, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Fully aware of all the global challenges facing us, we must prepare for a long and exhausting campaign — working step by step and tackling one problem at a time — for poverty reduction and the development of underdeveloped countries, and against the scourge of terrorism, organized crime and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, wherever such threats arise.

The world is yet again faced with new challenges. The United Nations have yet again to make crucial

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decisions in response to them. Poverty, weapons proliferation and AIDS are among the most destabilizing factors on the international scene, as is terrorism. I am sincerely convinced, therefore, that this year's debate on all these issues, especially on the issue of terrorism, will pave the way towards a consensus among Member States on the specific measures to be taken and thus invest the United Nations with new authority, which is so urgently needed to counter threats to international peace, health, stability and collective security.

Allow me to take this opportunity to stress the importance of dialogue to resolve the most pressing issues of today. Dialogue is essential and, it goes without saying, only possible among those who are ready for it. Dialogue based on mutual respect represents a key instrument for the improvement of relations and cooperation among peoples and countries. It is a fundamental condition for the successful outcome of negotiations and reconciliation of differences to reach decisions that are acceptable to all sides.

We in Bosnia and Herzegovina have learned the value of dialogue the hard way. Consider our recent past, during which the lack of dialogue caused misunderstanding, conflicts and hostilities that resulted in the tragic loss of human life, the exodus of young people and the devastation of the economy over the past decade. The entire international community not only witnessed this tragedy but was called on to be actively involved to overcome it.

I can only feel proud that I am addressing the Assembly today as the head of State of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the international community no longer views as a crisis area. Rather, it has become a State that actively participates in stabilization processes in the region and throughout the world. From the Central European Initiative and the South East European Cooperation Process to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Bosnia and Herzegovina is contributing to regional, European and world peace and prosperity. At the same time, committed to reforms, we strive to lay the ground for overcoming the aftermath of recent conflicts and are devoted to respect for the human rights of all individuals and peoples, as well as their cultural, religious and other diversities.

I would like to point out that the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina are giving priority to

advancing the political and economic stability of the country and enhancing its international role through the implementation of planned reforms. I am convinced that we in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in partnership-like cooperation with the High Representative and other representatives of the United Nations and international institutions, will find the best solutions for the implementation of reforms and the most adequate legal solutions for the realization of a faster economic development of the country and the creation of real chances for the integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the European Union.

In the process of Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to European integration, we have just completed discussions with the European Commission (EC) within the framework of the feasibility study. Working on the EC's tasks has been a positive experience in building partnerships with the international community. We are now entering a new phase with full confidence, convinced that the initiated process will result in the final fulfilment of all conditions for membership in the European Union (EU). This comes as a result of the decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities to take their destiny into their own hands and to respond to major challenges such as the fight against organized crime and corruption, the strengthening of institutions, conducting legal system reforms, implementation of structural reforms and reduction of the unemployment rate.

We are committed to following the path of proven success strategies in order to overcome as soon as possible our difficult heritage from the past and to start building, with mutual understanding, a modern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only in this way may we pass on to future generations the message of worldwide peace and development, based on mutual understanding and tolerance.

This year Bosnia and Herzegovina took over the chairmanship of the South East European Cooperation Process. We are content with the positive steps taken, both in the stabilization and in the overall development of the Balkan region and integration of the Western Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic structures. I am pleased that mutually harmonized agreements and joint priorities are being fully supported by the EU, by the Stability Pact, by many friendly countries in the world and by international financial and other organizations. I am all the more pleased in view of the fact that the

countries of the region confirm their readiness and commitments to mutual cooperation and the building of good neighbourly and regional relations.

I must stress the fact that there are still many open issues and incomplete tasks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am convinced that Bosnia and Herzegovina will succeed in the process of strengthening joint institutions and in establishing a strong legal framework. We are committed to fulfil all Bosnia and Herzegovina's international obligations, particularly those related to cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, participation in the world's fight against organized crime, respect of human rights, return of refugees and displaced persons, full implementation of property laws and the return of property to its rightful owners.

Our absolute priority is the fight against terrorism and organized crime, and, at the international level, we are of the view that the United Nations and the Security Council should play the leading role in that fight. Together with other countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina intends to actively tackle this issue, which represents a threat to the entire civilized world. Fully committed to this fight, we in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the assistance of the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which successfully completed its mission last December, have established one of the most modern state border services. In addition, we have improved the legal framework and we are fighting actively against the trafficking of women and children, this modern form of slavery. Our efforts have recently been recognized by the United States Government, and as result, we have been moved to category B.

The issue of missing persons is particularly sensitive and difficult for Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have to make additional efforts, with the assistance of the international community, to at least give the opportunity to grieving families to discover the whereabouts of their loved ones, what happened to them, where they were buried, and to identify their remains and lay them to rest with dignity.

Allow me to point out that Bosnia and Herzegovina is now a much better place for business than it was a year ago, due to the reforms completed during this year in particular. I would like to mention the example of the Bulldozer Committee that redrafted 50 laws and regulations that were discouraging private

initiative and suffocating any sense for business. Having created a more favourable legal framework and business environment, Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a better place for investment opportunities and employment.

Nevertheless, we must not lie back, we must further accelerate the process of economic reforms. The continuation of the privatization process and further reforms of the judicial system are of utmost importance for creating a more secure business environment in order to open the country to direct foreign investments.

We are in the process of rearranging and simplifying the tax system through the establishment of a single custom system and a value-added tax, thus eliminating corruption and white-collar crime. In order to encourage the entire process of the creation of an investment-friendly environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in February 2004 we will be hosting an international investment conference in Mostar, where we will present the new economic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Hoscheit (Luxembourg), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Furthermore, particularly during recent days, we have been finalizing the reforms of the armed forces and the State intelligence service, having realized that a modern security system is a pre-condition for Bosnia and Herzegovina's full participation in common security arrangements, through membership in the Partnership for Peace and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

At this moment we attach paramount importance to reforms and the modernization of the educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is our firm belief that, by caring for the individual and by ensuring the collective right to get an education in one's own language and alphabet, we will enhance mutual dialogue and tolerance, in order to preserve the multicultural society of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Next year we also plan to finalize the reconstruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar, where we are planning once again to celebrate the reunion of both banks of the river and its people. This is our way of sending a global message to all civilizations: this bridge is built of versatile cultural materials, it is an alloy of various traditions and it is the paradigm of a

solution that is possible and evident despite the conflicts and differences in the world. I hereby invite you to make use of this opportunity and make this bridge a symbol of unity for the next year.

Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina were held almost a year ago. This time, the international community fully supported the election results. The international community expressed its readiness to support democratic processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and we, the elected authorities, have made our choice through reforms that have as their aim a modern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are committed to taking ownership, to bearing more responsibilities. During his 16 months in office, the High Representative imposed in the first eight months twice as many laws as he did in the second. We are pleased to note the trend of reduction of imposed laws this year, but our ultimate goal is a Bosnia and Herzegovina that is a member of the EU. This Bosnia and Herzegovina has its destiny in the hands of its own citizens and is on the road of no return towards European integration, with more power in the engine of its own institutions and less power in the tow truck of the United Nations High Representative. Above all, this Bosnia and Herzegovina has a constitution cut out to the measure of its peoples and to each and every citizen.

Allow me to conclude by looking into the future. We have presented our candidature for membership in the Security Council for 2010, reaffirming our commitment to build a State that may share its positive experience and participate actively in the world's peace-building, by that time, we hope, within the system of a reformed and reinvigorated United Nations. We are already participating in the United Nations peacekeeping operations in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Timor-Leste. We are ready to send our transport unit, military observers and civilian police officers to Liberia.

By the year 2009, we are planning to fulfil the conditions set forth for EU membership, fully committed to the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina based on stability, the rule of law, democracy and a market economy. We are gradually becoming recognized for our implementation of democratic and economic reforms and for harmonizing our priorities with international standards. Next year, from 15 to 17 May 2004 in Sarajevo, we are planning

to host the Second Intergovernmental Conference for Children in Europe and Central Asia, together with the Government of Germany and the United Nations Children's Fund. The Conference is the continuation of regional consultations held in Berlin in 2001, and the 2002 General Assembly special session devoted to children.

Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a sustainable State, albeit with the generous contributions and assistance from the international community, the United Nations and its most prominent leading figures, including the late Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, who will be remembered in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the head of Civil Affairs of the United Nations mission. We remain ever so grateful to those who lent us their hands in times of need and despair.

Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a State well on its way to being part of Europe, with the ambition to create an environment where the return of refugees and displaced persons will not be halted for political or economic reasons, but will be encouraged for reasons of economic prosperity and sustainability that will be achieved through the efforts of all of us.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Dragan Cović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Hoscheit (Luxembourg), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Natsagiin Bagabandi, President of Mongolia

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Mongolia.

Mr. Natsagiin Bagabandi, President of Mongolia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Natsagiin Bagabandi, President of Mongolia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Bagabandi (*spoke in Mongolian; English text provided by the delegation*): May I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the President for his unanimous election as President of the fifty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly and express my confidence that under his able stewardship this session will successfully accomplish its mission.

For the 58-year-old United Nations, which has been working throughout to maintain international peace and security, the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to foster development and progress, the passing year has proved to be a challenging period. Moreover, we feel deeply concerned that the United Nations and its staff members, who dedicate their lives to helping peoples and countries affected by wars and armed conflicts have turned into targets of terrorist acts. But it is our earnest belief that the noble mission of the late Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and other United Nations staff members who lost their precious lives while helping and assisting the people of Iraq, will not be in vain.

At the Millennium Summit, held at the turn of a new century, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and proclaimed their firm resolve to work together towards a more efficient and revitalized United Nations.

However, the emergence of a complex international situation and its subsequent developments cast into doubt the ability of the United Nations to develop a fast and adequate response to international crises, to maintain international peace and security, to prevent armed conflicts, to resolve pressing issues in war-torn countries and effectively assist them in building national reconciliation and reconstruction. Even more important, the relevance of the United Nations itself has been put into question.

It is therefore incumbent upon us to reaffirm anew, at the highest level, our shared commitment to implement the Millennium Development Goals unanimously adopted at the Summit and to reiterate the importance of enhancing the role of the United Nations and multilateralism in addressing the formidable challenges of the twenty-first century.

Mongolia has consistently supported the United Nations as the singular world Organization to serve the interests of its Member States and as a principal

instrument of multilateral cooperation, given its underlying purposes and principles as well as its universal representation. Mongolia stands for a reformed and revitalized United Nations, adapted to the evolving international realities, for its enhanced role and greater involvement in all areas pertaining to the maintenance of international peace and security, resolution of pressing economic and social issues and promotion of sustainable development.

As its practical contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Mongolia endeavours to provide the relevant personnel to its various missions and supports the efforts to make peace-building missions more effective with an increased emphasis on preventive diplomacy. While emphasizing the increasing importance of ensuring the safety and security of United Nations personnel engaged in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, my delegation fully endorses the additional measures recently adopted by the Security Council to this effect. Mongolia has signed the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and intends to ratify it in the near future.

My delegation shares the concern over the slow pace of the reform process of the United Nations initiated by the Secretary-General a few years ago. Hence, we believe that there is an urgent need to speed up the reform through identifying innovative approaches so that the United Nations and its Security Council are able to effectively address the challenges ahead.

Mongolia reiterates its support for a just and equitable enlargement of the Security Council by increasing the number of permanent and non-permanent seats and ensuring representation of both developing and developed countries, reviewing the veto power and democratizing working methods of the Security Council through enhancing the openness and transparency of its work. We support the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel of eminent personalities entrusted with a mandate to conduct a comprehensive analysis of evolving challenges and ways of strengthening the United Nations.

Some are portraying the contours of today's world as unipolar. Others are challenging this, arguing for a multi-polar world. It seems unreasonable to seek to command humankind and the patterns of its

existence under any particular roof or leadership, or to try to tear it apart into different directions.

In today's world, characterized by globalization and interdependence, it has become increasingly evident that, despite divergent views, we all live in one global village, breathe the same air and share a common future. Mutual understanding and cooperation are becoming the order of the day, rather than division, fragmentation, marginalization or discrimination. Indeed, contemporary human philosophy teaches us not to alienate or estrange, but, rather, to interact and align with one another.

In addition to the traditional threats emanating from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the spread of missile technology and inter- and intra-State conflicts, non-traditional threats, including terrorism, organized crime, illegal drug trafficking, scarce drinking water, environmental pollution and global climate change, are having adverse effects on regional and international security.

As a State party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), conventions banning chemical and biological weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, Mongolia deems it important to ensure their universality; to address disarmament issues in a comprehensive manner; to further reduce all types of weapons; to help the Conference on Disarmament to break through its ongoing impasse; and to strengthen monitoring mechanisms for the relevant multilateral treaties and agreements.

As a nuclear-weapon-free country, Mongolia actively supports the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in other parts of the world. Mongolia believes that the nuclear-weapon States should provide security guarantees to non-nuclear-weapon States and States parties to the NPT, and supports the conclusion of a multilateral treaty to that effect.

Mongolia is in favour of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula and of a peaceful resolution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear programme issue. In this regard, we are in favour of continuing the relevant multilateral talks.

Mongolia fully supports the efforts being undertaken by the international community to revive the Middle East peace process and to implement the road map, and supports the establishment of a just and

endurable peace in the region, on the basis of ensuring the legitimate interests of the parties concerned.

Mongolia shares the concern of other nations over the precarious situation and continued loss of life in Iraq despite the termination of major combat operations. Mongolia is in favour of an increased role and involvement of the United Nations in restoring peace and stability in Iraq and in providing humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people.

With the rapid advance of globalization and technological breakthroughs, we deem it important to create an enabling environment for all countries — especially weak, small or vulnerable economies — equally to benefit from globalization, and for the international community to offer support and assistance to those countries in their social and economic development and to enhance global partnerships for development.

Recent years have been marked by an increased emphasis on social and development issues, resulting in a host of international conferences on sustainable development, financing for development and food security, all organized under the auspices of the United Nations. The speedy implementation, at the national, regional and international levels, of the decisions taken at the social summits, as well as efforts to achieve the goals agreed by the Millennium Summit and at Monterrey, Johannesburg and Rome, have become the top priority of the world community. The recent Cancún Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization has revealed the complexity of the process, leading to a new round of talks on the Doha Development Agenda.

Growing development disparities between haves and have-nots; increasing poverty and unemployment in the developing world, in particular the least developed countries; the spread of HIV/AIDS; the debt burden and trade inequalities, and the further aggravation of such pressing issues remain our immediate cause of concern. We cannot ignore the fact that underdevelopment, poverty and social inequality could serve as a breeding ground for confrontations and armed conflicts. Hence, it has become imperative for the international community to display genuine solidarity and shared responsibility for our common good.

International cooperation is crucial in effectively addressing environmental challenges, including natural

disasters, global climate change, air and water pollution, and desertification. In this respect, small and poor nations warrant greater attention and support.

Mongolia commends the outcome of the first International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in August this year, under the auspices of the United Nations. We consider that the timely and expeditious implementation of the Almaty Plan of Action will help landlocked developing countries to become actively engaged in global economic integration.

Fifty-five years have elapsed since the adoption by the Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The relevance of this fundamental document has stood the test of time, as its underlying ideals have been enshrined in both international treaties and conventions and in national legislation, thus becoming the universal norms of humankind. The ideas contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been carefully integrated into Mongolia's 1992 Constitution, and my country is firmly pursuing policies to consolidate democracy and to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thirteen years ago, Mongolia irreversibly embarked on the road to democracy and has endeavoured to make its own contribution to the cause of promoting democratic ideals. Earlier this month Mongolia hosted the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which resulted in the adoption of the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and Plan of Action. More than 600 representatives from 119 countries and a host of international and non-governmental organizations participated in the Conference, thoroughly discussing and sharing their experiences on a wide range of issues under the main theme of "Democracy, Good Governance and Civil Society". It is gratifying to note that the Conference successfully completed its ambitious agenda. My delegation will actively collaborate with others in ensuring effective follow-up to the implementation of the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and the Plan of Action at the national, regional and international levels.

The State and Government of Mongolia are pursuing an open and multifaceted foreign policy and undertaking specific measures to consolidate the

democratic reforms with a view to ensuring human-centred development and human security, promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, fostering political and economic stability and achieving sustained economic growth.

In conclusion, may I express my confidence that deliberations on the pressing issues before the international community during this session of the General Assembly will be productive and result in sound decisions that contribute to the strengthening of international peace and security and the advancement of social progress and development. In this context, you may rest assured, Sir, of the continued support and full cooperation of my delegation.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Mongolia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Natsagiin Bagabandi, President of Mongolia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (continued)

General debate

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Shara' (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to congratulate Mr. Hunte on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that his wisdom, as expressed in the policies of his friendly country, will promote constructive dialogue among Member States. In the final analysis, constructive dialogue remains the most valid means of addressing the complex problems currently facing the international community.

It also gives me great pleasure to express to the Secretary-General and his staff our sincere appreciation for the effort they have made and the hardships they have endured in preserving the status of this Organization, and for not submitting to attempts to marginalize it in the international arena. It is with deep sorrow that we recall the great loss that the United Nations in general, and the friendly country of Brazil in particular, suffered as a result of the death of

Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues in the attack against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad last month.

Many leaders and other representatives of the peoples of the world have gathered together at this international forum. That in itself proves beyond any doubt that this edifice of international legitimacy, and the resolutions that are adopted here, remain the most acceptable and respectable political recourse available to the various countries of the world, be they large or small, rich or poor. This is the only forum in which it would be extremely difficult to pass an arbitrary or pre-emptive war resolution that would result in the deaths of innocent civilians and the destruction of their property.

Our world today faces daunting challenges that threaten the very foundation of the system of international peace and security. World leaders are therefore called upon to make a sincere and concerted effort and to demonstrate unwavering political will to commit themselves once again to the principles of international legitimacy. Giving precedence to the logic of force, violating the sovereignty of nations and taking actions that affect people's future compromise legitimacy and the principle of equality. Such policies represent a miscarriage of justice and an abrogation of the rule of law. They will open the door to widespread chaos in international relations and to crises that might be more dangerous than those we are currently facing.

My country believes that the failure to reap the optimal benefits of the remarkable scientific and technological advances that humanity has made in the past two decades, coupled with the failure to achieve globalization with a civilized, human face, have alienated our peoples and heightened their apprehensions. It has obstructed the dialogue among civilizations and blocked further interaction with other cultures. Attempts by some centres of power in the world to manipulate the profound changes that have taken place in the international balance of power in pursuit of narrow national interests have added insult to injury. Cards have been shuffled and premises have been challenged. New concepts that are totally alien to the Charter, such as pre-emptive war and unilateral and illegitimate use of force, have been invented. In brief, that course of action has turned the clock back — contrary to the superficial claims that new prospects were actually being opened.

It is regrettable that in the twenty-first century some think tanks provide decision-makers with misleading or false information on the basis of which wars are waged outside the context of international legitimacy and blood is shed. Accusations are made that completely lack credibility, and unbridled claims are advanced in deliberate disregard of any logic developed by States and peoples throughout their history.

Our region — the cradle of the divine religions and the storehouse of two thirds of the world's oil reserves — has been victimized more than any other, suffering greater injustice, being subjected to more disinformation campaigns and enduring greater use of force than any other region. It has to endure a great many external threats that continually lay waste its potential and its material and intellectual resources. No sooner had the peoples of the region begun to enjoy their freedom and independence than they found themselves once again faced with violent and unjust challenges — challenges that are worse than any they have known throughout their history.

The scourge of the Israeli occupation and continued Israeli aggression has been the main reason for the suffering of our region since the concept of international legitimacy first emerge in the international community. That is the concept on which the Organization was founded and which it came to epitomize. There is a profound paradox that has become the hallmark of our region. Israel was the first State to acquire its legitimacy through a resolution adopted by the United Nations, yet Israel was also the first State to ride roughshod over international legitimacy — and it has continued to do so to the extent that Arabs and many others around the world feel as if Israel were a country above the law, one that enjoys the same veto power in the Security Council as the United States.

It is regrettable that, after decades of occupation, bloodshed and contempt for international legitimacy, the representative of Israel has yet to realize that the road to peace lies in Israel's implementation of the 37 Security Council resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the nearly 600 General Assembly resolutions on the same subject, all of which have so far remained hostage to Israeli defiance of international law.

It behoved the Israeli Foreign Minister to explain in his statement to the international community in this Hall a few days ago the reasons for his country's refusal to implement this enormous number of resolutions of international legitimacy on the Middle East, instead of ignoring them, considering them null and void, items of the past. Are the Syrians, the Lebanese and the Palestinians unrealistic in their demands, or are they asking for the impossible when they stress that the only way out of the spiral of violence and bloodshed is through ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories occupied since June 1967, through negotiations to pursue a comprehensive, just and lasting peace on the basis of implementing United Nations resolutions and the Arab Summit peace initiative adopted at Beirut in 2002?

The nagging core question here is how much longer Israel continue can to mislead some into believing that it is being victimized while it continues to occupy the territory of others by force, lay siege to Palestinians, destroy their homes, uproot their trees and assassinate them in their occupied land. When did the victims of occupation, settler colonialism and population transfer become outlaws and terrorists without a just cause, whose killing by fighter jets and tank fire became sanctioned under the pretext of self-defence?

Some people in Washington have asked "Why do they hate us?" Some authors with ulterior motives, or self-proclaimed pundits writing for reputable American newspapers or appearing on famous television programmes, volunteer their answers: "They hate us because we have skyscrapers and noble values." They choose to ignore that what is hated are the flawed policies, and not the country and its beautiful landmarks and cherished cultural and humanitarian values.

The grave situation in Iraq has become a source of serious concern for our people, who are already plagued by Israeli occupation and continued threats against them. The situation is also a major cause of concern for the international community due to the threat it poses to international peace and security. The credibility of our Organization suffered greatly when the United Nations was unable to prevent the war against Iraq, a war waged outside the context of international legitimacy.

For weeks and months, the Security Council was drawn into bitter strife, debating the war resolution prior to the war. The marathon report of the inspectors came out before the inspectors had accomplished the tasks entrusted to them. That situation notwithstanding, most of the members of the Council were able to stay the course, upholding international legitimacy and the Charter. The war was ultimately waged outside the framework of international legitimacy and those members chose not to its burden.

Along with other neighbouring countries, Syria remained committed to the principles of international legitimacy and the Charter. In an unprecedented démarche, our countries unanimously stressed their common concern that, should this war break out, its repercussions on regional security and international peace would be more devastating than the precarious situation prevailing in Iraq at the time.

That said, Syria does not base its foreign policy on hatred, nor do we gloat over the misfortunes of others. We do not redefine our policy in response to threats either. The real challenge, we believe is how to extricate Iraq from this predicament and mobilize all efforts to win the battle for peace in post-war Iraq.

Our country is directly concerned with developments in Iraq, given our historical and geographic ties and our common national loyalties to the Iraqi people. Syria affirms that finding the way out of this predicament does not lie in focusing on addressing the lack of security in Iraq, thereby increasing the number of troops and using force to bring about security, or on levelling accusations at neighbouring countries. The way out lies in an international commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq, setting a clear timetable for the withdrawal of the occupying forces from Iraq as soon as possible, drafting a constitution accepted by the Iraqis and establishing a Government that is representative of the Iraqi people, provided that the United Nations plays a pivotal role in Iraq in the various political, security and economic fields.

This session of the Assembly has seen intensive discussion among the permanent and elected members of the Security Council on a new draft resolution on Iraq. We must draw attention here to the requirement that any draft resolution to be adopted by the Security Council should allay the misgivings of the Iraqi people in all their factions and affiliations. Therefore, the draft

resolution to be adopted by the Security Council must be brought to full maturity, so as to reassure the Iraqi people about their future and to guarantee their independence and sovereignty over their land and resources. The members of the Security Council should unanimously accept such a resolution, and it must enjoy the support of neighbouring States and the international community.

Much has been said lately about the dangers of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — paid by countries that already have different types of such weapons. Some have even waged a war under the pretext of eliminating such weapons. As is already known, this danger is not confined to a particular region in the world, but can be found in many other regions. What is truly regrettable, however, is that some international quarters selectively choose to level false accusations against certain Arab and Islamic States, but not against others, while ignoring the Israeli arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Also ignored have been the repeated appeals by all the countries of the region, with the exception of Israel, to make the Middle East a region free of all weapons of mass destruction.

Syria this year translated its words into action by submitting an integrated draft resolution to the Security Council, calling for declaring the Middle East a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. It is not surprising, however, that those who led the media campaign against Syria stood in the way of adoption of the Syrian initiative.

Syria is aware that its membership in the Security Council is temporary. However, we appeal to the international community to continue to support the Syrian initiative calling for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East region.

Syria has condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We have supported the Security Council's efforts to counter international terrorism throughout the time of our membership of the Council. Syria has also acceded to the relevant international conventions to combat terrorism, including the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism and the Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism. Both instruments define the crime of terrorism and distinguish between terrorism and the legitimate right

of people under foreign occupation to resist occupation, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Syria, which is not pursuing any political agenda, believes that the international community's success in its overall battle against terrorism depends, to a large extent, on its success in addressing the root causes of terrorism, which are often found in poverty, ignorance and injustice. First and foremost, eliminating injustice requires an end to foreign occupation.

As a member of the Security Council, Syria has contributed to all the deliberations on the situation in Africa. Syria has also presided over Council meetings that were dedicated in full to finding solutions to the predicaments of the friendly people of Africa. On more than one level, the Council has succeed in providing assistance to Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Burundi, Angola and Sierra Leone. My country would like to express its satisfaction at the positive developments that have made it possible to find peaceful solutions to African questions, which have guaranteed the security, stability and territorial integrity of the African States concerned. Syria expresses its total solidarity with the African continent. We call upon industrialized States and others able to do so to provide assistance to the countries of that great continent.

Syria also expresses its satisfaction with the progress made in the Sudanese peace talks, with the signing of the agreement on security and ceasefire arrangements, and ultimately with the comprehensive agreement that will end the conflict in that fraternal country in a way that would preserve the Sudan's unity and territorial integrity.

We call for a total lifting of the embargo imposed on Cuba for decades outside the context of international legitimacy.

We also welcome the international efforts to defuse tensions on the Korean peninsula, and support the Korean people's legitimate aspirations to unity and prosperity.

Acting upon the collective responsibility of Member States to promote the role of this international Organization, Syria has actively participated in the deliberations on the reform of the United Nations. In that regard, the Millennium Declaration, which was

adopted three years ago, represented a good basis, all things considered, to bring about that reform. We hope that the reform will continue to be carried out in a comprehensive, transparent and non-selective manner. We believe that, in cooperation with the Secretariat, Member States have a primary role to play in the consultations on reform and in the decisions to be taken accordingly.

The President returned to the Chair.

In conclusion, our sense of the daunting responsibility that we must shoulder together as members of this international Organization should prompt us to raise some rhetorical questions. Do we have at our disposal a better option than to enhance the purposes and principles of the Charter and to pursue the goal of reforming the Organization for the establishment of a more just and more democratic international order? Should we not persevere to safeguard the milestone achievements of international law? Should we not aspire to a system that will not accommodate the arrogance of power nor compromise our fundamental principles? Should we not seek a system that pursues fruitful cooperation among States and encourages openness and a dialogue among civilizations epitomizing the essence of a creative human interaction?

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Cyril Svoboda, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Svoboda (Czech Republic): Let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, and to wish you every success in your important position. It is a pleasure to see as President a representative of Saint Lucia, the smallest country ever to hold the office. That fact upholds the Charter principle of the sovereign equality of nations in this important world body, as well as the desirability of universal membership in the United Nations, where all countries, large and small, have something to contribute.

I also take this opportunity, Sir, to thank your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his work and efforts devoted to the activities of the United Nations throughout the past year. It was a great honour for the Czech Republic to preside over the General Assembly and to use that unique opportunity to further enhance

the United Nations capacity and ability to respond to current global challenges.

Let me also express my country's deepest sympathies to all who have lost loved ones in terrorist attacks, including the attack on the United Nations building in Baghdad, which claimed the lives of the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and a number of his co-workers. We view that horrible act as an attack against the principles of freedom, democracy and peace, the principles on which our Organization is built.

The United Nations effort aimed at the stabilization, democratization and reconstruction of Iraq has the full support of my country, and I appreciate the bold and selfless work done by the staff of the United Nations. The United Nations plays an irreplaceable role in that field. We therefore support the idea of adopting a new Security Council resolution that would provide a framework for the widest possible participation of other countries. The Czech Republic will actively participate in that process, and is determined to continue its engagement.

The recent terrorist attacks in Iraq and other regions of the Middle East strengthen our conviction that the international community must not give in to terrorist threats. On the contrary, we must combine and intensify our efforts to combat them. The success of cooperation between the United Nations, the Coalition Provisional Authority and Iraqi representatives in stabilizing the situation in Iraq and handing over the country's administration to the Iraqi people will be the essential step in that direction. The Czech Republic therefore welcomes the establishment of the Governing Council, the appointment of provisional ministers and the continued work on drafting a constitution, and is interested in the speedy creation of a stable Government in Iraq that will honour its international commitments and respect human rights and freedoms and the fundamental principles of democracy. But that is not something that can happen overnight, as we know from our own experience. The transition from dictatorship to a functioning democracy takes some time.

We believe that progress in the Middle East peace process based on the road map must be at the centre of the efforts of the whole international community. We should not allow extremist and terrorist groups to dominate its agenda, as recent developments have

shown. At the same time, we call upon all parties involved to exercise maximum restraint in taking actions that may contradict the achievement of a peaceful political settlement of the crisis, especially extrajudicial killings and suicide bombings.

The Czech Republic supports activities aimed at reviving and continuing the implementation of the peace plan. In their talks, the Quartet and the parties concerned must take stock of the peace plan and identify obstacles on the road to peace, as well as outstanding tasks before the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Without proper implementation, the road map will suffer the same fate as those of the numerous peace initiatives we have seen in the past.

The problems of the Middle East are very complex. My country would like to emphasize three basic issues in this fragile phase that we consider crucial for the implementation and success of the road map for peace, namely, the security aspects of a peace settlement, the consistent suppression of all manifestations of terrorism and the consolidation and strengthening of the position of the Palestinian Government and its process of reform, including concrete steps to confront terror and violence.

In our view, tangible changes in the situation on the ground should be an inseparable part of those efforts. At the same time, with their vision of their own independent State, Palestinians should feel that their economic and humanitarian situation is improving. The Czech Republic is prepared to assume its share of responsibility in the efforts to improve the economic situation of Palestinian autonomous territories at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

The restoration of ethnic peace, the strengthening of stability and economic growth remain the main objectives of the international community in the crisis regions of the Balkans. In the present circumstances, the maintenance of an international presence in the region is still a necessary prerequisite for the development of democracy and the strengthening of peace. The United Nations and other international organizations must exercise their control function even more systematically, use their experience in assisting in the transformation of society, ensure the active participation of all ethnic groups in the area of administration, create conditions for the safe return of

refugees, help with development of local economies and curb organized crime.

I am convinced that Mr. Harri Holkeri, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo, will further contribute to the achievement of the declared objectives. The transfer of competencies from the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo to local authorities must, at the same time, include the transfer of responsibilities for the achievement of the objectives set by the international administration and, above all, the creation of conditions for the safe return of refugees. For the sake of the functioning of a multi-ethnic society, it is also necessary to ensure the active participation of all ethnic groups in the administration of the province.

The Czech Republic supports all international efforts in the field of disarmament and arms control, including verification of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. That process is a long-term priority of Czech foreign policy. The Czech Republic devotes considerable attention to the relevant international treaties and conventions in that regard and takes an active part in addressing security problems. We are convinced that it is necessary to promote and strengthen universal adherence to the three major multilateral agreements relating to weapons of mass destruction, namely, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. In that connection, we also support the promotion of an early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Particular emphasis should be placed on establishing effective verification mechanisms, namely, for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

We consider the Additional Protocol to the NPT, which creates an integral part of the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards system and strengthens the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to be a very important element of the verification system. That is why it is urgent for the States that have not entered into safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency to do so and to fulfil their obligations under article III of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We believe that the Additional Protocol should be made the standard for all NPT signatory States.

The problems associated with the current conflicts severely affecting civilian populations are closely connected with the issue of conventional weapons, especially as regards small arms and light weapons. The Czech Republic supports the international community in its efforts to prevent the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons and their uncontrolled proliferation.

The Czech Republic very much welcomes the fact that the international community is increasingly sensitized to the observance and protection of human rights. There is a growing body of globally recognized human rights and most cases of human rights violations are strongly criticized by the democratic international community. Nevertheless, it would be too daring to assume that criticism by the international community can always mitigate the consequences of a human rights violation. However, the fact that most entities in international law lay stress on human rights is unquestionably a positive aspect. I would therefore like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Czech Republic to call for the release of all prisoners of conscience in various parts of the world, as well as to call for the observance of their fundamental human rights.

In the light of recent developments, I consider it necessary to again mention the Nobel Peace Prize laureate from Myanmar, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, and the numerous Cubans who were sentenced to many years in prison in the political trials of March and April 2003. Those and similar cases only deepen the isolation of the countries concerned and do not solve the existing situations.

The Czech Republic remains fully committed to the United Nations and is aware of the fact that the United Nations is a universal international organization that plays an irreplaceable role in the present globalized world. We support the Millennium Declaration as the basis for the reform of the entire United Nations system and as a further step towards the strengthening of the Organization's authority, operational capability and effective functioning. We support in particular the initiatives of the Secretary-General aimed at improving the management and administration of the United Nations. Another important task is to proceed with the revitalization of the General Assembly, including such areas as the clustering of agenda items.

The reform of the Security Council represents a crucial element in the development of international relations in the new millennium. The Czech Republic shares the majority view that the composition of the Council is outdated, that it reflects the realities of the Second World War rather than those of today and that it should be adjusted to the current state of affairs. The present situation is unsustainable and undermines the legitimacy of the United Nations, and therefore calls for urgent action. The Czech Republic will continue to support inevitable reform steps, including the enlargement of the Council in both categories of membership. In particular, we support the aspirations of Germany and Japan for permanent seats, as well as the allocation of another three new permanent seats for Africa, Asia and Latin America.

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform the General Assembly of the decision of the Government of the Czech Republic Government to present its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2008-2009 as our contribution to safeguarding international peace and security.

I welcome the President's intention to focus the Assembly's attention on the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations summits and conferences held during the past decade and on the United Nations development agenda, including the Millennium Declaration Goals. The Czech Republic emphasizes the importance of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals as an overarching platform for specific actions to achieve specific goals and targets. Actions at the national, regional and international levels are necessary to fight poverty, improve access to health services and water, combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, provide education, bridge the digital divide and preserve the environment, to name only a few of our many concerns. At the same time, efforts to achieve development goals complement efforts to achieve sustainable development, including its economic, social and environmental aspects. The Czech Republic believes that a focus on multilateral and international cooperation is indispensable to the success of the United Nations development agenda. We are therefore prepared to continue to contribute to that important process.

As regards the strategic document entitled the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), in which, for the first time in their history, African

States assumed responsibility for their further development, the Czech Republic is well aware that support for that document must be translated into action as soon as possible. An active and constructive approach should be reflected in all horizontal activities of the international community. That is why the Czech Republic regards the principle of good governance as one of NEPAD's key principles that can substantially contribute to the establishment of suitable conditions for the integration of African States into ongoing globalization processes and to the creation of a favourable climate for the continent's further development.

As an acceding country to the European Union, the Czech Republic is prepared to assume its part in the implementation of the African policy that is part of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

In conclusion, let me stress that the challenge posed by security has likely been the most bitter and forceful to arise in the global community in the past two years. In that regard, we face a real test of our will and ability to cooperate, and in that connection the United Nations remains an irreplaceable forum for conflict prevention and a legal platform for the taking of multilateral steps to preserve the world's security and peace. In that respect, we very much support the Secretary-General's call for the strengthening of multilateralism, as international security cannot be fully achieved by single States or coalitions dealing with threats for the rest of the world.

Humankind has not been challenged in such terms in all of its history. I am not referring solely to terrorism or nuclear threats, but also to various epidemics, poverty and the worsening environment, which are themselves the root causes of conflicts. Furthermore — and we are now witnessing this in Iraq — reactive military actions, both targeted and of short duration, are part of the solution, but they do not provide the whole remedy. There is an irreplaceable role for the world community to play. We, the Member States of the United Nations community, should together therefore focus our utmost attention on efficient measures to make our planet secure and prosperous for present and future generations.

The President: Before I call on the next speaker, may I again ask for the Assembly's cooperation and support with respect to telephones. I ask members to

please set their phones to vibrate, because they do cause terrible disturbances for speakers. Please assist as best you can by setting your cellular phones on vibrate. I do not want you to lose your calls, but they should not disturb speakers.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Win Aung, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar.

Mr. Aung (Myanmar): Allow me, at the outset, to extend my warm felicitations to you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Your vast experience and diplomatic skills augur well for the success of our deliberations. I would also like to express our gratitude and appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his invaluable contribution to the success of the previous session of the General Assembly. We also pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts in leading the Organization through challenging times.

We are meeting at a time when the world is facing daunting challenges. In addition to the perennial problems of extreme poverty, the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation, we are faced with the challenge posed by new forms of terrorism. We must confront all those challenges squarely if we are to fulfil the vision of global prosperity and collective security set out in the Declaration of the Millennium Summit, three years ago.

The United Nations has a vital role to play in ensuring peace and security. Myanmar firmly believes that the Organization must be revitalized to accomplish our objectives. We cannot overcome the complex problems that beset our world without universal commitment to multilateralism and a reaffirmation of faith in the central role of the United Nations in the promotion of global peace and security. The importance of multilateralism and the need for countries to strictly abide by the principles of international law cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, Member States, both large and small, have an interest and a responsibility to uphold the Charter of the United Nations.

More than ever before, our world needs greater international solidarity and cooperation. In that respect, we welcome the intention of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations into a more effective Organization.

My delegation also shares the Secretary-General's concern that the pre-emptive use of force could set precedents that could result in a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification.

Recent attacks by terrorists in Baghdad, Bali, Casablanca, Jakarta, Jerusalem, Mumbai and other places serve to remind us of the grim fact that the fight against terrorism is not over. It is evident that the use of force alone cannot wipe out terrorism. If we wish to achieve enduring results, we must address such fundamental problems as the persistence of extreme poverty, the disparity of income between and within countries, racial and religious prejudice and attempts by some countries to impose their values on small and developing countries.

Terrorism poses a common threat to humankind. It respects neither borders nor religion nor race. All nations must therefore join hands to meet the challenge posed by terrorists. It is only through increased cooperation at the national, regional and international levels that we can hope to overcome that menace. I wish to reiterate that Myanmar is against all forms of terrorism. We have had bitter experiences with terrorism in our own country and we are firmly committed to work with the international community to prevent, counter and eliminate that terrible scourge of humankind.

Last month, terrorists brought their war to the doorsteps of our Organization when they attacked the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. They took the lives of 22 people, including that of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, one of the most outstanding international civil servants. We join the rest of the world in paying tribute to his memory and profess our profound sadness over the loss of the life of the Special Representative, and of other lives, in that unwarranted attack.

I would now like to turn to recent political developments in my country. Some have accused us of deliberately creating a political impasse in order to delay the transfer of power. If one takes a close and objective look at the situation in the country, one will see that what needs to be done to effect a smooth transition to democracy is, first and foremost, to have the political will to do so. Let me assure the General Assembly that we have that political will. We are firmly committed to bringing about a systematic transformation to democracy. In the past, successive

Governments in Myanmar failed in their attempts to build a multiparty democratic system, because they were unable to overcome the fundamental issues facing the nation, namely, the issues of peace and stability, national unity among all national races — which number more than 100 — economic development and human resources development. Attempts were made without first solving those fundamental problems; the country drifted and the people suffered.

The present Government, aware of the fact that fundamental issues must first be addressed, adopted a different approach. It laid down four political objectives: first, to establish peace and stability in the whole nation and to ensure the prevalence of law and order; secondly, to consolidate unity among all national races; thirdly, to strive for a durable Constitution; and, fourthly, to build a modern and democratic nation in keeping with the new Constitution.

At the outset, an olive branch was extended to the armed groups that had been fighting the Government for decades. Following successful negotiations, those groups returned to the legal fold. National unity was achieved. Peace now reigns in the entire country, providing an opportunity for long-neglected border areas to develop quickly. The gap between urban and rural areas has been narrowed. At the same time, we have taken developmental initiatives to promote a better life for our peoples. We have worked tirelessly to provide better health care, education and housing for all our peoples. We have had to rebuild the country from scratch.

Those who come to Myanmar will be able to observe at first hand the immense transformations taking place in the country. As the adage goes, seeing is believing. Today our people can look forward to the future with confidence and renewed hope. Now that firm foundations have been laid, we have moved on to the next phase to commence work on the drafting of a new Constitution and to build a modern democratic nation in keeping with it.

The new Prime Minister, General Khin Nyunt, who was appointed on 25 August 2003, outlined a road map for the transition to democracy. The seven-step programme includes, first, the reconvening of the National Convention, which has been adjourned since 1996; secondly, after the successful holding of the National Convention, the step-by-step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a

genuine and disciplined democratic system; thirdly, the drafting of a new Constitution in accordance with basic principles and the detailed basic principles to be laid down by the National Convention; fourthly, the adoption of the Constitution through a national referendum; fifthly, the holding of free and fair elections for *pyithu hluttaws*, or legislative bodies, according to the new Constitution; sixthly, the convening of *hluttaws* attended by *hluttaw* members in accordance with the new Constitution; and, seventhly, the building of a modern, developed and democratic nation by the State leaders elected by the *hluttaw*, the Government and other central organs formed by the *hluttaw*. All strata of the country's population have adopted a unified approach and supported the road map.

In recent weeks, Myanmar has taken substantial steps on the road to democracy. It is important that the international community recognize those positive changes; credit must be given where credit is due. Myanmar is working to ensure an environment in which we can achieve our objectives. The people of Myanmar are enthusiastic about consolidating the progress achieved thus far. At the same time, we seek to maintain good and friendly relations with all countries in the region and in the rest of the world so that we can thrive and prosper. We have never posed a security threat to any neighbour, and we have always sought to promote regional peace and stability and the common weal of all our nations.

It is disconcerting that some countries have chosen to turn a blind eye to reality and have subjected Myanmar to a wide array of unfair economic sanctions for their own political ends. Those unilateral coercive measures not only go against the spirit and the letter of the Charter of the United Nations, but also violate international law and rules of international trade. They are intrinsically unfair and only add to the hardships of people already marginalized by globalization. Countries that place a high premium on democracy and human rights have a responsibility to live up to those noble ideals in their relations with others. Our common aspirations to peace and development can be fulfilled only if nations avoid double standards and adopt a more positive attitude.

We live in challenging and dangerous times. Conflicts and tensions in various parts of the world threaten global peace and security. Transnational crimes and new forms of terrorism also add to our

problems. Yet it is in our power to make the world a better place. Here, it is pertinent to recall what I stated last year in this hallowed Hall: if we want to ensure a better future for mankind, we must heed the teachings of the world's great religions. Every religion calls for tolerance, understanding and compassion for fellow human beings. Only when we can overcome anger and hatred and do away with false pride and prejudice will we succeed in establishing a world in which peace and justice prevail.

All conflicts, rivalries and hostilities have their roots in hatred and enmity. We must try to overcome them. We should all try to build a global order where the strong will not impose their will on the weak and where democracy prevails not only within nations, but also in the international arena. Let us work together, as a family of nations, to overcome the serious common challenges that we face.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Maher El Sayed, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Mr. Maher El Sayed (Egypt) (spoke in Arabic): At the outset, Sir, I should like to convey to you, both personally and in your capacity as a representative of your country, Saint Lucia, my sincere congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that you will lead its work with efficiency and skill. I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for his remarkable and effective contribution to the results achieved during the last session, results we value and seek to deepen further.

We meet today at a critical juncture in world history. More than ever before, we need to chart and define clearly the path we wish to take to avert the confusion of concepts and the undermining of established principles. Doubts have been raised about the United Nations and its role; attempts have been made to circumvent it and ignore the fact that it was born out of the world's tragic experience in the first half of the previous century. From that experience, the world drew the necessary lessons concerning the need for collective action to solve problems, to prevent wars and to enable peoples to rule themselves and to cooperate for a better future.

I believe that the time is now past for such doubts. Everyone has come to realize the importance of

taking action through the Organization in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity. That is the only way to save the world from new divisions and scourges. That new development places new responsibilities on us all to cooperate within the United Nations in a spirit that seeks unity rather than division, cooperation rather than conflict, real solutions to problems rather than ways of addressing them without justice and respect for the Charter, thus lacking legitimacy and effectiveness.

Commitment to the Charter and to international law is the safety valve for the international community. The role of the United Nations cannot be reduced to the role of the Security Council alone and to the questions that it can or cannot address. In our opinion, the United Nations is much larger than that; its contributions embrace all the elements of the wide-ranging and complex international agenda.

In that regard, we reiterate that challenges such as terrorism and illicit drugs, diseases, disarmament, protection of the environment, AIDS and achieving sustainable development can be met only through coordinated action in which all States, large and small, act within an international framework that enjoys legitimacy and is conducive to the attainment of common objectives.

In that connection, I should like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his distinguished role and his continuing efforts in strengthening the purposes and principles of the United Nations to enable the Organization to shoulder its responsibilities and to achieve its goals. Kofi Annan played a significant role in returning the Organization to the centre of events. In the course of United Nations efforts to carry out its noble principles, many of its staff members lose their lives. In the recent tragic events in Baghdad, Egypt lost two of its brave nationals who had been working ably in the service of the Organization's principles.

Tragic events have struck many countries and peoples. Foremost among them were the events of 11 September 2001, which afflicted the friendly people of the United States of America — events that we fully condemn and deplore. In the midst of the agony and anxiety generated by such events, inescapable conclusions have been reached: we must unite in combating terrorism on realistic, sound and legitimate bases; we must avoid confusing terrorism with certain legitimate acts that are inspired by the wish to break

the shackles of occupation, domination and injustice; and we must understand that the desire to combat terrorism must not become the only yardstick for judgement.

Experience has proven that in combating terrorism we must not fail to see that it is not a product of one of the world's major cultures. We must not ignore the fact that terrorism is not confined to a certain region and that the fight against it must not be restricted to the perspective of security or politics alone. Terrorism is by nature a multifaceted phenomenon. As such, it must be dealt with in a comprehensive manner that encompasses its political, economic, security, legal and psychological aspects, as well as the conditions exploited by some to justify it.

The United Nations has proven its ability to coordinate international efforts and to achieve tangible results in this field. Egypt has participated seriously in all activities aimed at strengthening international efforts against terrorism. This has been Egypt's objective all along. In 1995, Egypt launched President Hosni Mubarak's initiative to convene a high-level international conference under United Nations auspices to consider ways and means to combat terrorism. This initiative gave expression to Egypt's keen interest in supporting the international efforts aimed at reaching a clear and precise understanding of the fight against terrorism, including through special negotiations on the comprehensive convention to combat international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The Egyptian initiative must not be construed as a chance for protracted polemics or disagreement that clouds our objective. On the contrary, it is a call to frame a document that expresses the international political will and reflects the international resolve to eradicate the scourge of terrorism, to restore peace and security, along with justice and stability, and to clarify the responsibilities of each and every member of the international community.

Our world today is facing numerous challenges regionally and internationally. There are challenges to the logic of fairness, justice and peace and challenges related to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the slow pace of international action in the field of nuclear disarmament. We are witnessing tendencies to consecrate the right to possess, develop, and modernize nuclear weapons. Some States still cling to the obsolete doctrines of deterrence and attempt to find justifications for the use of nuclear weapons.

Therefore, it has become necessary to widen the establishment of zones that are free of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, I recall Egypt's repeated assertions, in all international forums, that rendering the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, in a comprehensive framework that applies to all without exception or discrimination, is the only way to spare the region and the world the dangers that threaten all our achievements and all that we strive to achieve. It is unacceptable that Israel's possession of such weapons should remain a reality that some prefer to ignore or should prevent the international community in Vienna, New York or elsewhere from facing it fairly and squarely.

The Middle East region continues to suffer from the absence of peace. There were high hopes that the historical reconciliation between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples was within reach after the Oslo accords, the parties' mutual recognition and the subsequent agreements and negotiations. Yet the efforts failed every time, seemingly because the Israeli party does not yet fully share the conviction of all, expressed by President George Bush and the Quartet, that the solution lies in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders, that would live side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The Palestinian people continue to be subjected to oppression, provocation, and aggression. They continue to languish under the oppression of a cruel and unfair occupation that generates feelings of despair and frustration and leads to a spiral of violence and counter-violence whose victims are innocent civilians.

It is high time for the international community to reiterate its call to the parties to return to the negotiating table in order to implement the principles of international legality and to achieve a just peace in the entire Middle Eastern region on the basis of a complete withdrawal to the 1967 borders and of respect for rights. Egypt has continually made efforts to achieve that objective in Palestine, the Golan and in the occupied Lebanese territories, confident that the logic of peace will prevail over the logic of aggression and that the resolve of the people who yearn for a peace that achieves security and opens the door for development will prevail over those who continue to harbour ambitions of expansion and aggression and thus put the interests of their peoples in danger. They will bear a heavy responsibility for that.

The situation in Iraq is cause for grave concern. We reaffirm anew the need for respect for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Iraq, as well as the need to create conditions conducive to the earliest possible withdrawal of the occupying forces and the assumption by the United Nations of a central role in assisting the Iraqis in the political and economic reconstruction of their State. Egypt affirms its readiness to contribute to the reconstruction process, in accordance with the wishes and needs of the Iraqi people and in cooperation with the rest of the international community, under the aegis of the United Nations. We look forward to the day when the aspirations of the Iraqi people are realised and when it becomes an effective and free partner working with its Arab brothers for a better future.

Egypt welcomes the recent agreement between the government of the Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), an agreement that paves the way for a consolidated effort towards a better future for the people of a united Sudan and one that ensures equality, security and prosperity for all its citizens. Egypt calls upon the international community to assist in securing the implementation of this agreement. The profound and eternal ties and relations between Egypt and the Sudan and our firm belief in the commonality of the hopes we entertain and the threats we face impel us to be in the vanguard of action for the achievement of that lofty goal. It alone can guarantee the maintenance of the interests of the Sudanese people as a whole, as well as the interests of the Arab world and the African continent.

Egypt believes that cooperation for development is the cornerstone of multilateral international action. The eradication of poverty is a moral, human, and political responsibility shared by the countries of the North and the South. It is the shortest route to achieving international peace and security. A fair look at the international economic situation must conclude that it is impossible to accept the continuation of the current imbalance in the distribution of wealth among the peoples of the Earth. Equally impossible to accept are the lack of democracy in international economic decision-making, the grave fluctuations in the efficiency of the work of the world financial markets, the unfair trade practices against the interests of developing countries and the policies that lead to recurrent financial crises which eliminate, in a few days, the achievements of decades of great sacrifice.

We regret that the Cancún Conference was unable to produce the desired and previously agreed outcome of affording developing countries a real opportunity to benefit from liberalization based on balanced trade. Instead, it made liberalization an obstacle to the efforts of developing countries to promote growth and development under difficult and complex circumstances.

Egypt has welcomed the outcome of United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Summit Declaration, and has called for full implementation of the letter and spirit of the decisions adopted. Hence, we view with satisfaction the decision of the General Assembly at its last session to consider in 2005 at a high level the implementation of the outcomes of international summits and conferences.

Globalization, with the hope it brings for international cooperation that benefits all, could turn, if misused, into an attempt at domination, thereby exacerbating the structural flaws in the international system at both the economic and political levels. Hence, there is a need for measures to increase the effectiveness of international institutions and to achieve good governance, which is as necessary on the international level as it is on the national level, and to create a favourable economic environment. There is also a need to adopt a comprehensive package of reforms that includes international finance and for mutual respect among cultures and civilizations so that dialogue and cooperation can benefit all and can promote understanding between nations and peoples.

While urging the United Nations to continue its efforts in the promotion of international cooperation for development, Egypt stresses the importance of taking the cultural diversity of societies into account. It is also important to seek acceptance of the other as an equal partner in discourse without the imposition of certain models. At the same time, we reiterate that this cooperation must be the fruit of a new philosophy that posits the common destiny of mankind in a unified and interactive manner, whereby if one part suffers, the rest will subsequently suffer. The repercussions of the economic and social problems in a given country or continent can no longer be confined to a single place. Rather, these repercussions now swiftly find their way to the rest of the world.

The United Nations should place the situation in Africa among its top priorities, in view of the political,

economic, social, and environmental challenges facing it, as well as the outbreak of armed conflicts, spread of deadly epidemics and plunder of the riches and resources of peoples, whether directly or indirectly through the imbalance in trade and economic relations.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) constitutes a new starting point to change the standard of living in Africa. It is an initiative created by the Africans themselves, based on their own vision of their reality, needs and the great hopes of the African peoples for a better future and their wish to be partners with the world for the sake of development and progress. Egypt reaffirms the need to implement the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly last year, which took NEPAD as a framework for development in Africa. Egypt calls for the development programmes of international organizations to be adapted to the priorities set by NEPAD. Egypt urges donor countries and economic organizations and institutions to provide support to the African countries for the implementation of NEPAD and the achievement of its desired objectives.

African countries have already established within the African Union the machinery required for the implementation of the initiative. The international community is called upon to help bridge the financial gap that impedes the achievement of poverty reduction in Africa. This should be done through a prompt and comprehensive approach.

Egypt's belief in the centrality of the role of the United Nations in the world, now and in the future, impels it to reaffirm the urgent need to develop and increase the Organization's effectiveness. This includes the reform of its main organs, particularly the General Assembly and the Security Council. We all agree that there is a need for reform and that this reform is a long process. Many of the steps towards reform have been implemented. However, much remains to be done to strengthen collective and international action through the revitalization of the General Assembly and reform of the working methods of the Security Council. All States should be given ample opportunity to shoulder the responsibilities of membership in the Council.

Therefore, we continue to support a comprehensive approach to the reform of the Security Council and believe that this process should be based on two main guidelines: a commitment to the overall concept of reform and the rejection of a policy of

taking small steps in one direction or another. The Open-ended Working Group of the General Assembly — the only open and transparent forum available for the consideration of this important subject — should also continue its consideration of this matter and abide by its mandate.

The dangers that beset us all make it imperative for us to rally around the lofty principles established under the Charter of our Organization. We must translate our belief in those principles into continuous work that transcends greedy ambitions, hatreds, illusions and the desire for domination and hegemony. Our work must proceed from a belief in the equal rights and duties of peoples. Thus we will achieve the hopes of the peoples of the Earth and spare them hardship and suffering.

The path towards that objective lies in the commitment to United Nations resolutions and the cessation of attempts to ignore, circumvent or adapt them to serve purposes incompatible with the Charter and with law and justice. If we uphold those principles, we will all be victors. The only vanquished ones will be the forces of evil and aggression, which will be defeated by our peoples' hopes for a more just and secure world for all.

The President: I now give the floor to His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Prince Al-Faisal (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to convey to you, Sir, and to your friendly country, Saint Lucia, our congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly. I would like to express my appreciation to you personally and my full confidence in your ability to effectively conduct the work of the Assembly at this session.

I would also like to express our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, who led the work of the Assembly at its last session with wisdom and expertise.

I also wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretary-General and to express the gratitude of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for his continuous and tireless efforts to establish peace and security in the world, strengthen the role of the Organization, increase its efficiency, preserve its credibility and enhance its effectiveness.

It is saddening and distressful that this session is convening while the echo of the horrendous attack against the United Nations offices in Baghdad that took the life, among others, of one of its prominent and towering figures, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello is still resonating in our hearts. I avail myself of this opportunity to convey to the Secretary-General, to the staff of the Secretariat and to the families of the victims of this tragic incident my sincere and deepest condolences. I would also like to express the hope that neither this incident nor the most recent one that took place a few days ago will impede the efforts aimed at promoting the role of the United Nations in consolidating stability and prosperity in Iraq.

The hideous attack on the United Nations offices in Baghdad represents a challenge that can be dealt with and contained, and the necessary security conditions to minimize such occurrences in the future can be established. However, our Organization is, at this juncture, facing other challenges that are more serious than what happened in Baghdad, challenges related to its *raison d'être* and to the principles and foundations stipulated in its Charter. These principles were not heeded and the responsibility for this is ours. This has in many instances impeded its effectiveness and credibility.

Nevertheless, its ability to exist and perform and the contributions it has provided and continues to provide in various humanitarian, cultural and social fields through its specialized agencies are sufficient to encourage support for the Organization and provide it with every assistance it needs.

In the comprehensive speech he gave at the outset of this session, the Secretary-General referred with clarity and transparency to the growing trend towards unilateral action outside the realm of international legitimacy in dealing with current problems such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This expanding trend to resort to unilateral action on the basis of the right to self-defence could undermine the principle of collective security on which the Charter was founded. We stressed this in the Millennium Declaration that was issued by the General Assembly three years ago.

Nevertheless, we have to admit that not confronting such actions effectively and with seriousness and steadfastness when faced with dangers and threats such as those that emanated from the

regime of Saddam Hussein, have led, it seems, to confusion. This confusion has provided the advocates of collective action and the defenders of unilateral action with parallel arguments that each group is now using against the other. Whoever wants to criticize the policy of unilateral action will find no difficulty proving that such a policy could only exacerbate and increase problems.

On the other hand, those who criticize the international community for being lax in acting collectively to confront such problems that threaten security and stability will also come up with arguments to prove that such reluctance and negligence in facing challenges is behind the eruption of the major crises of our contemporary history.

It was therefore natural that, due to such divergence in views, a situation was reached wherein the focus turned to debate and theorization rather than to dealing directly with current problems and deciding on practical measures to resolve them. This is exactly what happened with respect to Iraq immediately before the war.

International terrorism, in all its manifestations and forms, represents a very dangerous challenge to our international Organization and to the international community at large. It deserves our condemnation which must be resolute, categorical and unequivocal. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has expressed this position at different forums and international gatherings.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has suffered and continues to suffer from acts of terror, has launched a relentless war against terrorism, enacted regulations that punish perpetrators, inciters and sympathizers with terrorist activities and has introduced counter-terrorism as one of the main subjects in the curricula of its schools. It has also taken a series of measures to close any loopholes in the way charities collect money, in order to prevent funds from being diverted for unlawful purposes.

However, regardless of its effectiveness, the international effort directed against terrorism will not eradicate this phenomenon without addressing its root causes and the reasons for its spread.

The Palestinian issue, which has become a constant item on the agenda of all the sessions of the General Assembly over the past five decades, continues

to be a cause of instability and turmoil in the Middle East region, whose nations yearn for peace, prosperity and development. I don't think I need to go into the details of this issue, of which you are completely aware, but we should remember Israel's persistence in its provocative policies and practices, which focus on repression, persecution, political assassinations, settlers' issues and the ominous fence. This is an approach that has subverted all initiatives and proposals aimed at solving the Palestinian issue, including the Arab peace initiative and the road map.

The solutions that were presented on the Palestinian issue were harmed mostly by the Security Council's contradictions, especially among its permanent members, in dealing with resolutions in this regard. We see resolutions being adopted but remaining mere ink on paper, and when the time comes for their resolutions on implementation, the veto power is invoked to abort implementation.

The only way out of this vicious circle, from our perspective, is for the permanent members to pledge not to use the veto power when dealing with resolutions or measures aimed at implementing the substance of resolutions previously adopted. This matter may be one of the issues that the reform team proposed by the Secretary-General should consider in order to invigorate the role of the United Nations in handling current issues and challenges.

The people of Iraq look to our Organization to end the confusion, anarchy and chaos that resulted from the collapse of the previous regime. The major problem facing Iraq now is the absence of a clear vision as for the future of Iraq and the fact that Iraq cannot control its own destiny. Iraq faces a grave and complicated internal situation, coupled with a delicate and sensitive geographical location.

It is therefore of utmost necessity that we set a clear timetable that would assure the Iraqis that they are close to restoring their sovereignty and independence through an accelerated political process linked to specific commitments, whether with regard to consolidating the power of the transitional Iraqi Government or drafting a new Iraqi constitution that would pave the way for the formation of a legitimate national Iraqi Government under which all citizens would enjoy equal rights and responsibilities.

Based on this premise, my country views the Transitional Governing Council in Iraq as representing

a positive step paving the way towards this goal. While we give utmost importance to the role of the United Nations in Iraq, we are hopeful that any debate on Iraq will focus on determining its needs and finding effective means to respond to them, including contributions by all Member States to this noble effort, namely the stability of Iraq.

That must be done speedily, efficiently and in a way that would conform with the needs of Iraq. Iraq is a country of pivotal importance, geographically and historically, in our region. It possesses natural and human resources that qualify it to take a prominent role in the international community. All it needs from us is an initial push to allow it to regain its sovereignty, stability and growth.

The manifestations of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are a cause of great concern and tension in the Middle East. This means that we must declare the Middle East and the Arab Gulf region a zone free from weapons of mass destruction.

With regard to the need to increase the effectiveness and universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and its system of safeguards, monitoring and inspection, we also believe that certain standards and controls must be put in place to assure progress in all fields of the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. Based on this, we call upon all countries that have yet to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to take the necessary steps to do so, especially Israel, and to submit their nuclear sites and installations to the international safeguards regime.

The international situation looks again as it used to be during the time of polarisation, including increasing tensions, crises and divisions that have paralyzed the Security Council. Despite the fact that we have entered the third millennium, we still lack the needed commitment and collective political will to translate our commitments into reality. International peace and security are still but a hope and an aspiration for many people and countries. Comprehensive development is still a dream for many and a distant objective we all hope to achieve.

In the Middle East, where countries suffer from these symptoms, we see in the ideas presented by President Bush, for the promotion of development in the Middle East many positive signs, which

collectively present a model for fruitful cooperation between rich nations and developing countries.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince presented an initiative aimed at reforming the situation in the Arab region in the economic sphere, with structural reforms as well as expansion of political participation at its core. If the region succeeds in benefiting from these two initiatives, its future will be promising.

The fact that there are still chronic issues on the agenda of our Organization, like the Palestinian problem, issues of comprehensive development and the emergence of issues like Iraq makes it incumbent upon us to embark on two parallel tracks: credibility in upholding the principles of the Charter, and seriousness in implementing United Nations resolutions. We must not substitute futile and senseless arguments which would be useless to us all for practical solutions.

Our deeply rooted belief in of the important role that the United Nations can play in dealing with crises and its efforts to avoid the horrors of war and to provide means for international cooperation make us more determined than ever to support this Organization and consolidate its constructive role. We want the United Nations to take a greater role in handling crises before they occur through the implementation of what is known as preventive diplomacy rather than through pre-emptive wars, in order to preserve stability and maintain international peace and security.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ernst Walch, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Principality of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Walch (Liechtenstein): Let me first pay tribute to the commitment and the courage of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and all the United Nations staff members who lost their lives in the unprecedented attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. The date of 19 August is engraved in the consciousness of the international community and in the annals of the United Nations. We were forced to face a fact that we have not tackled with the necessary determination in the past: the vulnerability of United Nations staff worldwide. While legal protection can certainly not prevent an attack such as the one of 19 August, we must nevertheless provide the best possible protection in this respect. We therefore hope that the General Assembly will take the necessary measures to make the

United Nations Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel more effective.

The process that led to this engagement of the United Nations in Iraq constituted a major crisis for the existing mechanisms dealing with threats to international peace and security, first and foremost the Security Council. This Organization is subject to and dependent on the political will of its Members. Its distinctive quality lies in the fact that it provides legitimacy in accordance with international law. This outstanding quality it must not lose, and we are all challenged to stand up for this core function of the United Nations, which is a good part of its *raison d'être* in today's world. The crisis the United Nations has gone through in connection with the action taken against Iraq will not be overcome simply by adopting a pragmatic approach in dealing with the aftermath thereof. We welcome the ongoing discussions in the Security Council on a stronger and more meaningful role of the United Nations in Iraq. At the same time, there must also be a recognition that international law continues to be the foundation for our actions in dealing with problems of international peace and security and that the rule of law needs to be applied both at the national and at the international levels.

Like any other State, in particular small States, Liechtenstein attaches the highest possible priority to the rule of international law — expressed, *inter alia*, in our commitment to the International Criminal Court — and international relations that are based on rules derived from international legal standards. The United Nations, as the core body for drafting and adopting those standards, must continue to play its role in defending and upholding them.

It is more obvious than ever that the Security Council is facing a particular challenge in this respect. While discussions in the media, in the academic world and in think tanks after the military action against Iraq invariably have focused on the theme of the need for quick and effective Security Council reform, this sense of urgency was lost on the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council Reform — the very body that has the competence to make decisions on such reform. After 10 years of debate on this issue, we all appreciate the difficulties attached to it, and they are indeed big. However, these difficulties are not sufficient justification for our failure to resolve an issue that everybody agrees is a major obstacle to the effective functioning of the Organization as a whole. It was

therefore rather disturbing to see the Open-ended Working Group continue engaging in business as usual, while the world — the world we are supposed to represent, after all — unanimously called for effective and comprehensive reform.

The composition of the Council is clearly a reflection of a geopolitical reality that ceased to exist a long time ago and enlargement thus continues to be an indispensable element of a meaningful reform of the Council. At the same time, there is also a clear need to address other issues, such as the mechanisms for decision-making and in particular the implementation of Security Council resolutions — whether adopted under Chapter VI or Chapter VII — and issues of legality. We hope that the initiative the Secretary-General presented last week will contribute to making the main organ that is at the centre of the world's attention a more effective and representative body.

While the work on Security Council reform has been slow and unsatisfactory overall, it has nevertheless produced some important and positive results. The Council has opened up to the membership as a whole and increasingly engaged in open debates, both on thematic and on other issues of concern to the membership as a whole. Liechtenstein welcomes this development and has participated in many of those debates.

This increased openness of the Council, however, does not resolve the issue of its accountability. The effectiveness and credibility of the Council will be much enhanced if it bases its decision-making on a dialogue with the States on whose behalf it acts. In the recent past, the Council has made some decisions that were controversial and others that were of unprecedented reach. Some of the measures taken in connection with financial sanctions impact directly on the lives of individuals who have no means of bringing their grievances stemming from such decisions to the attention of the Council. Since the Council makes its decisions on behalf of the entire membership and since their implementation is mandatory for all Member States, there should be ways for all Member States to express the concerns they might have with regard to such decisions. The appropriate body for such discussions is obviously the General Assembly, the only main organ of the organization of universal membership.

When educating people about the United Nations, we keep stumbling upon one issue: The need to explain that the United Nations is not identical with the Security Council. The fact that the Council is seized with the most burning issues and the most pressing international crises is only one part of the explanation for this fact. The flip side which we must no longer ignore is the increasingly futile struggle of the General Assembly to play its rightful role in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. An overburdened agenda, sterile debates, an overflow of documentation and the routine adoption of resolutions, that are but a rehash of past resolutions, have a combined devastating effect on the relevance of this body.

The General Assembly is today paralysed to a point that keeps it from dealing with the politically crucial issues and from acting in a quick and flexible manner. A good illustration is the resolution in which the General Assembly condemned the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Even though everybody shared the shock and dismay about this vicious attack, it took the General Assembly almost a month to adopt the said resolution.

The current state of the Assembly sadly plays into the hands of its detractors. Presiding over the General Assembly is a very difficult task, Mr. President. If you are able to lead this Assembly out of its established routine of paying lip service to its own reform and if you are able to initiate the radical reform this body so desperately needs, you will have created a lasting legacy, and we will support you.

Much has been said about the crisis in which the United Nations finds itself after this difficult year. However, every crisis is an opportunity, and I hope that the Assembly will take up its work in this spirit. Very rarely over the past few years has the public interest in the United Nations been greater than it has over the past 12 months. We must ensure that the peoples of the world continue turning to the United Nations as the place where established rules are upheld, new challenges are tackled and effective and responsible action is taken collectively.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fathulla Jameel, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives.

Mr. Jameel (Maldives): Allow me at the outset, Sir, to convey to you, on behalf of my delegation, our sincere congratulations on your election as the

President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. It is indeed an added pleasure for my delegation to see such a distinguished personality from a sisterly small island State preside over the Assembly.

Allow me also to extend my delegation's profound gratitude and appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, former Deputy Prime Minister and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, for the exemplary manner in which he steered the work of the fifty-seventh session.

I would also like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my delegation, to express our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dedication and his untiring work in promoting the noble principles of this Organization. I also congratulate him in particular for the courage and foresight with which he proposed last week much-needed reforms to this Organization. I sincerely wish him every success in carrying them forward.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's sentiments of sadness and deep sorrow at the tremendous loss suffered by the international community in the recent terrorist bombings of the United Nations premises in Baghdad. I pay a special tribute to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and to the other staff members of the Organization who made the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of humanity.

Terrorism has always menaced the human race in one form or another. Yet never before have we witnessed acts of terrorism so organized, so frequent and so lethal, threatening international peace and security in its entirety. The Baghdad bombing and other violent eruptions elsewhere in the world grimly remind us that serious threats to world peace and security remain, undermining the noble principles that had so far contributed to the survival of the world order and to the sustenance of the values that we upheld. Much has been done, yet the persistence of such deplorable acts signals our failure to address the fundamental causes of those threats. Bold decisions need to be taken swiftly to address them.

Since my country fell victim to a brutal terrorist attack in 1988, we had tried, on many occasions, to impress upon the Assembly the threats to small States posed by increased international terrorism. A decade and a half later, the threat of terrorism is affecting us all, irrespective of our physical size, economic

strength, political power or military might. For some small States, the danger is graver, as a terrorist onslaught could severely threaten even their sovereignty and independence. Therefore, let me emphasize the importance of providing support and assistance to small States in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), and of strengthening their institutional capabilities in this important field.

We all should recognize that the strength and stability of the international security system or of any political order is determined by the strength not of its strongest, but of its weakest members.

Maldives will nevertheless continue to support the war against international terrorism in the spirit of contributing to enhanced international peace and security.

The structural impediments facing small island developing States such as Maldives are numerous. The geophysical characteristics of our island States, combined with their remoteness from major markets, have accentuated our vulnerabilities. Nearly a decade ago, we met in Barbados to address the environmental vulnerabilities and developmental challenges faced by small island developing States. However, addressing those vulnerabilities and challenges requires a meaningful global partnership, with shared responsibility and commitments at the highest level. My country hopes that Barbados+10, to be held in Mauritius next year, will provide an impetus for the international community to renew the commitments to concrete action it made at Barbados 10 years ago.

The globalization of the world economy and the liberalization of the multilateral trading system are continuing to marginalize the developing countries, especially the least developed countries. As tariff barriers fall, so does the potential for developing countries to compete effectively in the open market. Hopes were dashed at Cancún recently, as the Conference proved disappointing, leaving the developing countries still afflicted with problems.

Abject poverty and disease in the developing world exist at a level that defies comprehension, while deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis remain rampant. Development opportunities for the least developed countries appear bleak. I therefore call for a level playing field for all countries, with preferential treatment for the weak, and,

in particular, for narrowly based economies such as that of my own country, who find it hard, if not impossible, to sustain their share of the global market.

My delegation believes that a greater commitment to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries is a prerequisite if we are to halt and reverse the deteriorating situation of the least developed countries. While I express my appreciation of the donor community's willingness to help those countries accelerate their growth and sustain their development, and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, it must be said that the Monterrey pledges remain far from being realized.

The overriding objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action to arrest and reverse the continued socio-economic marginalization of the least developed countries and to improve their participation in international trade and their share of foreign investment and other financial flows will also remain but a dream if official development assistance is not increased and international development assistance is not augmented.

As I have stated on many occasions, Maldives is not simply an island nation; it is a nation of many far-flung islands covering 90,000 square kilometres of ocean. Our islands are resource-poor, and the saline soil conditions prohibit most agricultural production. Transport and communication costs are exorbitant. The scope for economic diversification is very limited. That is why we have appealed to the international community to take a closer look at our true situation before the issue of our graduation from least-developed-country status is considered by the Economic and Social Council.

As I emphasized in my statement to the Assembly last year, the structural weaknesses of our economy could have grave implications for my country's development, should it be deprived of the preferential access to markets and the concessional capital that it has critically relied upon.

The Committee for Development Policy (CDP) has fully recognized the special circumstances of small States like Maldives that are environmentally fragile and economically vulnerable. The CDP has also, over the years, highlighted those vulnerabilities and the severe costs that small island developing countries will have to endure in the event of their graduation. We

believe that, unless these vulnerabilities and costs are addressed in a concrete and meaningful manner, the conditions for graduation set forth in Assembly resolution 46/206, particularly that of smooth transition, will not be met. We are concerned that, if such issues are not adequately addressed, graduation will reverse the progress that we have made so far.

Although the criteria for inclusion in the list of least developed countries and graduation therefrom have been regularly reviewed and refined, they still fail to cover the entire range of structural and other handicaps. We are glad that the CDP is continuing its work on refining the criteria. We also believe that, of the three criteria for graduation, that relating to the Economic Vulnerability Index must be a requirement, if we are to ensure that a country will not lapse back into a lower category of development after the fatal day of graduation.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development profile of Maldives also highlights a number of circumstances not covered by the criteria. The profile very clearly states that graduation would result in an unsustainable debt burden, even if there is sustained growth. The rate of our economic growth has declined significantly since 1997 and graduation at the present time would therefore amount to a serious exogenous shock. This is precisely the situation that we are so desperately trying to avoid.

In accordance with the decision taken at its 2003 substantive session held at Geneva, the Economic and Social Council will soon consider the issue of the graduation of Maldives from least-developed-country status. We sincerely hope that we will receive the necessary support and cooperation of all countries with a view to adopting a comprehensive resolution that would address the issue of graduation in a holistic manner and require an appropriate mechanism to ensure a smooth transition.

In this connection, we would like to express our full support for the call by the CDP to convene an expert group meeting to address the issue of smooth transition. We also expect the International Meeting on Small Island Developing States, scheduled to take place in Mauritius next year, to formulate recommendations to guide policies on the graduation of small island developing States.

Following the glimmer of hope for the revival of the Middle East peace process, we are again witnessing

an unprecedented deterioration of the situation in Palestine and the Middle East. We strongly condemn the Israeli move to deport President Yasser Arafat from the Palestinian territories, as well as the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people. We have consistently supported the just struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their inalienable rights and to establish an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds as its capital. We call upon the members of the Quartet, particularly the United States, to ensure the implementation of the road map for peace. While we sincerely believe that the United Nations has an important role to play in the peace process, we are also convinced that the United States needs to remain actively engaged, as it currently is, in a spirit of sincerity, in the search for a just, permanent and lasting peace in the region.

The international community should maintain the high priority that it has accorded to disarmament and arms control efforts, without any discrimination among nations or regions, with a view to making the world a more peaceful place. The international community must strengthen and improve the enforcement of the non-proliferation regime. In this context, we believe that the United Nations not only must be at the centre of the multilateral process, but must remain the principal player in grappling with important global issues. We believe that, with unity of purpose and in a spirit of complementarity, bilateral, regional and multilateral approaches can lead to the resolution of these issues.

As the Secretary-General emphasized, the need to reform the United Nations to enable it to face the challenges of a changing world remains paramount. We are convinced that the United Nations, with its universal membership, is not only the sole legitimate body responsible for the preservation and maintenance of international peace and security but also a unique body, capable of achieving the goal of a better and secure world for humankind. We should never, therefore, allow the United Nations to be marginalized or diverted from its role or the principles of the Charter. Maldives remains committed, and will do its utmost to contribute to strengthening the role of the United Nations and to making it more efficient and effective.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ould Tolba, Minister for

Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Tolba (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, I should like to convey to you, Sir, our warmest congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am convinced that your great wisdom and wealth of experience will guarantee the success of our work. I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, who guided the work of the previous session with great skill and ability.

I would also like to express congratulations and great appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and all his associates, for their outstanding and tireless efforts to achieve the noble ideals of our Organization. I would also like to express our satisfaction with the action taken since the previous session of the General Assembly, in particular the meeting in New York of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which addressed measures and priorities envisaged for implementing recommendations of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, the decisions of the Johannesburg Summit and the Millennium Development Goals.

I note particularly the efforts to facilitate access for poor countries to quality medicines to combat endemic diseases.

The hideous murder of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, together with a number of his closest associates, in the terrorist attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad profoundly shocked and distressed us. The increase of terrorism and its consequences in terms of fear and human and material destruction require the international community to step up consultations, cooperation and coordination and strengthen efforts to tackle the dangers that threaten all humankind.

Achieving the objectives of development, security and stability hinges strongly on how effectively we handle the challenges of extremism and terrorism. My country, while stating its commitment to relevant Security Council resolutions, reiterates its absolute and firm condemnation and denunciation of

violence and terrorism in all its forms and reaffirms its support for all regional and international efforts and initiatives to combat this scourge.

Given the global nature of terrorism, the fight against it must necessarily be global in nature and be underpinned by an intellectual and cultural dimension based on the complementarity of civilizations and absolute rejection of any clash or conflict between them.

We also must not overlook the impact of imbalance in the development levels of rich and poor countries, since poverty and social, scientific and technological under-development are primary causes of tension and sources of violence and extremism.

There can be no doubt that maintenance of peace and security around the world requires a greater role for the United Nations and the strengthening of international law. My country therefore notes with satisfaction the acceptance by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government of the road map as submitted by the Quartet. This framework offers a fresh opportunity to establish a just and lasting peace in the interest of all peoples of the region, ensuring the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, pursuant to the decisions of the Madrid Conference, the principles of land for peace and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

My country stresses the importance it attaches to the demand that Israel withdraw from the occupied Arab territories and that negotiations be resumed immediately, as the only way towards peace and security in the Middle East.

On the question of Iraq, we welcome the establishment of the new transitional Iraqi Government, while stressing our concern for the independence of that fraternal country, its sovereignty, the safety and security of its people and its territorial integrity.

Regarding the question of the Western Sahara, Mauritania supports the steps taken by the Secretary-General and his personal envoy, Mr. James Baker, aimed at seeking a permanent solution that guarantees stability in the region and enjoys the agreement of all parties.

As regards the positive developments in the Lockerbie crisis, we express our satisfaction at the solution reached between the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the parties concerned. We also welcome the lifting of sanctions against Libya by the Security Council.

Regarding the African continent, we welcome the establishment of African Union institutions and organs which will help resolve conflicts in the continent and respond to the aspirations of African peoples to progress and development. We also wish to express our satisfaction with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which is aimed at enhancing regional cooperation in order to achieve economic integration in the continent. We are also pleased by the support given to this initiative by our development partners.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, under the leadership of the President of the Republic, Mr. Maaouya Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, is peaceably pursuing its course towards progress and development, inspired by the comprehensive and coherent vision of a societal project that meets national aspirations and offers real prospects for social advancement, modernization and openness within the context of a State governed by law, justice and equality.

That strategy focuses on combating ignorance and illiteracy, and on spreading scientific and other knowledge by promoting books and reading as part of a large-scale national programme entitled "Knowledge for all", launched by His Excellency the President of the Republic, to which, over the past few years, 3 per cent of the State budget has been allocated annually. That leading-edge programme, regarded around the world as one of the best cultural projects, involves in its first stage the establishment of 1,000 libraries in major population centres, particularly in rural areas, equipped with books and reference works relating to various fields of professional, cultural and social life.

This significant network of cultural institutions is striving to instil the habit of reading among all segments of society and within all age groups. It also helps to disseminate a civic spirit to promote sound thinking, combat ignorance — illiteracy and professional and cultural ignorance — in order to strengthen and supplement the efforts made in that area by the competent agencies. The implementation execution of that programme follows a participatory approach that offers the populations concerned and

civil society organizations a basic monitoring and follow-up role. All the major societal forces have mobilized under the programme, and our citizenry understands its scope and the importance.

By opting for that strategic approach, our country is embracing a vision in which human dignity, freedom, equality and social justice, the consolidation of noble human values, the preservation of safety and security and social peace around the world and comprehensive, fair and balanced development are all noble objectives that can be achieved or maintained only through the total eradication of ignorance, illiteracy and cultural and intellectual underdevelopment.

The basic focuses of this strategy also include the protection of women's rights as a dynamic factor of society, and increasing the participation of women in the various fields of national life. The same is true of childhood development and the protection of the rights of children. In that context, appropriate legal instruments have been promulgated and a policy of development has been built around those priorities, which have accelerated the pace of human and social development indicators.

It has been possible through substantive reforms to launch private enterprise and to create a favourable climate for investment, despite the impact of the current world economic situation. The national strategy to combat poverty has made it possible to improve the living standards and conditions of the population, with the widespread provision of basic social services such as health, education, water, energy and telecommunications. It should be noted that those results could not have been achieved without a climate of security and stability promoted by a regime of pluralistic democracy that has eliminated all forms of exclusion, opened the path to effective citizen participation, promoted all individual and collective freedoms and given particular attention to the promotion of human rights.

The United Nations Charter reflects the common aspirations of the peoples of the world to achieve their fundamental objectives, including safeguarding international peace and security. The profound changes in the international scene call for the revision of the structural organization of the United Nations, in order to adapt it to the new realities and in keeping with its objectives. In that regard, it would seem pertinent to

reconsider the system of representation within the Security Council.

We sincerely hope that the international community will pool its efforts to enhance international solidarity and build a new international order based on law and justice, one that safeguards peace and security and guarantees a decent life for all.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Chairman of the Observer Delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. We trust that you will guide the deliberations of this session with great efficiency, skill and wisdom. I also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, for having successfully led the deliberations of that session.

In addition, we should like to express our appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and for his commitment to the Charter of the United Nations with a view to enhancing international peace and security.

After the 1980s, Israel began unilaterally to delineate borders through the Seven Star Settlement Plan, initiated by Mr. Sharon when he was Housing Minister. The plan involves building Israeli settlements along the Green Line — the line of the old armistice — in order to obliterate the Line, which separates the territories occupied in 1967. Israel has used agreements as an opportunity to build more settlements, which now total 187 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The holy city, Jerusalem, has been subjected to an extensive Judaization campaign with a view to implementing the Greater Jerusalem plan to increase the number of settlers within Palestinian areas. Under that plan, land has been confiscated and a wall isolating Jerusalem from neighbouring areas is being built. Israeli settlers have occupied Palestinian homes in many Palestinian neighbourhoods. In Jerusalem, Israel has confiscated 70 kilometres of land in order to build bypass roads in the West Bank under the pretext of redeployment. Therefore, Israel has taken the first steps in implementing a plan aimed at establishing cantons, which, Mr. Sharon had planned long ago to isolate Palestinian cities and villages by building settlements

and bypass roads to prevent any geographic contiguity among population centres in Palestinian areas.

The building of the wall is part of the Israeli policy of imposing a *fait accompli*, of exploiting security conditions to attain certain objectives by creating bantustans and enclaves and by isolating Palestinian villages from their surroundings, including separating such villages from Jerusalem. Thus the separation wall has isolated the cities of Eizariya and Abu Dis on all sides. All entry and exit into and out of these two cities is through Israeli military checkpoints. We condemn you, Israel, for such actions.

An article in the 10 August 2003 edition of *Haaretz* reads:

"The Palestinian children who will be the next generation are being raised under extremely difficult circumstances in comparison with those who preceded them. They see only the ugly face of Israel; therefore, they will be consumed by blind hatred and a desperate desire for revenge."

Another article in the same newspaper this month notes:

"Israel lays the blame on Arafat, after it forced him to win the chairmanship of the Palestinian Authority by democratic means in accordance with the Oslo Agreement, ignoring the fact that it must, first and foremost, do its part to alleviate the tension by giving up the occupied territories."

The article continues:

"Can Israel ignore the regrettable fact that the European Union was among the majority that supported the General Assembly resolution? Israel's diplomatic defeat at the United Nations is the inordinate price that Israel paid as a result of a stupid decision by its Government — a decision that was no more than a declaration of its intentions. Its hope to eliminate Mr. Arafat is a stark embodiment of Israel's inclination to shirk responsibility and then to blame fictitious developments on the Palestinian side for the problem. Instead of taking the necessary action to calm the situation, Israel uses the working plans of its adversary as a pretext and then, should it fall short of meeting its goals, complains that there is no party to negotiate with on the other side."

First of all, Israel must contribute its share to settling the dispute — that is, it should make every possible effort to defuse the tension. According to *Haaretz*, there is a Palestinian ceasefire proposal, but the Israeli Government has refused thus far to respond positively to the offer. It continues to repeat its hackneyed position that an agreement is not possible while Arafat is in power and as long as the Authority fails to dismantle the terrorist organizations. Israel imposes those conditions without making any change in the general conditions surrounding the conflict. *Haaretz* continues to say that the world has despaired and wrung its hands in frustration. The Israelis do not express condolences when our sons are killed; they do not denounce such killings, nor do they even establish any contacts.

Before the road map was announced, the Palestinian Authority had been called upon to undertake certain reforms, such as drafting a constitution, creating the post of premier and transferring certain powers from the President of the Palestinian State and the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority to the Prime Minister. Chairman Arafat made many concessions to assist the Palestinian Government in carrying out its duties. The Government of Israel made several attempts, under various pretexts, to delay the declaration of the road map: first, it was holding the Israeli elections at the beginning of the year; then it was establishing the Cabinet; then it was waiting for the Iraq war. Finally, when Israel hesitantly accepted the road map, it rejected 14 of its provisions.

At the Sharm al-Shaikh Summit and at the Aqaba Summit of 6 June, the representative of the Palestinian Authority — who at that time was Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas — committed himself to implementing the road map, pledging to meet its requirements before President Bush of the United States, King Abdullah of Jordan, the King of Bahrain, and President Mubarak of Egypt. He announced the Palestinian Authority's commitment to a ceasefire and its readiness to recognize Israel within secure borders. However, in his statement Mr. Sharon refused to mention Israel's commitment under the road map to the vision of two States — the establishment of an independent Palestinian State that is viable and sovereign, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, as expressed by President Bush. Mr. Sharon did not accept the immediate cessation of all acts of violence against the Palestinians. All that Mr. Sharon

said were a few words regarding a Palestinian State without any mention of an independent, viable and sovereign State of Palestine. Nor did he declare an immediate cessation of Israel's acts of violence.

Despite that, the Palestinian Authority, together with all other resistance factions, declared a ceasefire on 26 June. That ceasefire was to remain in place for three months. Regrettably, Israel continued its terrorist practices, and the Israeli army of occupation assassinated 86 Palestinians. To sabotage the declared ceasefire, Israel assassinated the political leaders of the resistance factions. The situation then slipped into tension and confrontation, one month after the ceasefire had been announced.

International reports state that the majority of Palestinians in the occupied territories now depend to some extent on food rations. In May of this year, the World Bank reported that the volume of international contributions to the Palestinian territories had grown: since the beginning of the Palestinian intifada, external contributions accounted for more than \$1 billion of the budget of the Palestinian Authority. They have therefore provided sustenance to more than half a million people — the families of the employees of the Palestinian Authority. Those contributions staved off an enormous, acute humanitarian crisis. Donors who hoped for reconciliation had no choice but to make contributions because the Palestinian Authority's network of services collapsed and the living conditions of Palestinian citizens deteriorated. It is not strange, then, that the Palestinians persevere through international assistance.

However, this generosity on the part of the international community ultimately profited the Israeli enemy. International support provided a protective network through which Israel was able to afford an expensive occupation of the West Bank. Israel controls the areas militarily for free, without assuming any responsibility for the lives of the citizens there.

Fighting terrorism is an arduous task. However, we do not see anyone keenly seeking the root causes of or motivations for terrorism, nor even concerned about the international isolation that Israel is suffering because of its practice of State terrorism. It is as if the stifling Israeli economic crisis were a predestined, divinely ordained phenomenon. In the search for the culprits, Arabs and the resistance are held to be the cause of the crisis.

There was a real chance for the United States to embrace all the peoples of the world, not only through the compassion of those peoples for the people of the United States but also through the unified effort to fight terrorism. The United Nations should have seized that opportunity through a programme objectively and reasonably implemented, not by using cannons or fighter jets or by mobilizing huge forces to destroy a hated regime. The real reason for that was well known political and economic ambitions. The world was outraged at the military action, but it stood idly by, observing the consequences of the misuse of force.

The United States Administration expressed its keen interest in implementing the road map and establishing an independent Palestinian State. Regrettably, it did not, as a sponsor of peace, address the crisis with the required effort and effectiveness. It is not enough to stress the vision of President Bush or the commitment of his Administration to such a vision, while continuing to employ a policy of double standards. That Administration continues to blame and warn the Palestinian Authority. It continues to urge the Authority to combat the resistance, which they can see only as terrorism against the Israeli occupation, despite the fact that all international norms stress the right of occupied and colonized people to self-determination by whatever means. The United States Administration overlooks the Israeli leader's terroristic practices and Israel's failure to implement its commitments in accordance with the road map.

The shortcomings of the United States role reflect negatively on the peace process. They obstruct the process and make success very difficult, such as by refusing to deal with President Arafat, the legitimate, elected President of the Palestinians. Mr. Arafat is the only leader who has shown conviction and flexibility with respect to the peace process. As a result of that, Mr. Arafat shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated by dirty hands in Israel in order to prevent the continuation of the peace process, spreading anxiety and doubts among Palestinian and Israeli citizens alike.

The Arab side accepted the initiative of His Highness Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz for the establishment of comprehensive peace with Israel after its total withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories. The Crown Prince carried that initiative to Washington, D.C., in his historic meeting with President Bush in April 2002. The initiative was based on the agreed terms of reference for the road map, along with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

In conclusion, peace in itself is not an objective for Israel. That will be true as long as Israel continues to receive all forms of assistance from major Powers trying to maintain their strategic interests in the Middle East region, and opts to settle issues militarily, outside the framework of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council.

Israel has laid siege to the Palestinian people. It has paralysed the apparatus of the Palestinian Authority, preventing it from operating. The Israeli army assumed responsibility for security. But how did it do that? By killing, assassination and destruction. What is required first is the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the occupied territories to the borders of 28 September 2002.

The Security Council should adopt the road map and work to implement it through the Quartet. The siege against the Palestinian people and their elected President Yasser Arafat must be lifted. The United States must cooperate positively and effectively to facilitate the task of the Quartet and to warn Israel of the consequences of obstructing its tasks. Deploying international forces into a buffer zone created between the two sides will facilitate implementation of the road map and the Palestinian Authority's task of maintaining security in the area from which the Israeli forces will withdraw. Those forces will receive complete cooperation from the citizens of Palestine.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.